CHAPTER

1

Online Exhibitions versus Digital Collections

What is an online exhibition? Is a collection of objects on the Web an exhibition? What about digital collections? Can they be an online exhibition?

COLLECTION OR EXHIBITION?

It is very important to remember that a collection of objects does not make an exhibition. It is only when objects are carefully chosen to illustrate a theme and tied together by a narrative or other relational threads that they become an exhibition. The Web has enabled museums, libraries, and archives, as never before, to present their collections to a wider public. With the explosion in the growth of the Web since the mid-1990s, the availability of collections from these institutions has been expanding exponentially.

However, pinning down just what a digital collection is or how to define it has been a problem since memory institutions (museums, libraries, and archives) began to create them. Patricia A. McClung, in her 1996 Digital Collections Inventory Report, noted that

There are innumerable projects which feature pictorial images (e.g., photograph collections, maps, drawings of some sort, or museum collections); there are documentary text editing projects for individual personal papers; there are literary and historical text encoding projects (which for the most part feature SGML encoding); there are efforts to convert entire collections or to provide a critical mass of materials in a particular subject area; and there are a wide variety of experimental projects of one flavor or another. In addition to projects which convert print-based and/or photographic materials, there are a host of mixed-media projects, as well as projects focused on additional formats such as sound recordings, films, microfilm, motion picture film, etc. There are also a number of initiatives to make materials whose original format is electronic widely available via the Internet.

To get a better idea of how the mounting of collections on the Web differs from an actual online exhibition, let's look at a few types of online collections from museums, libraries, and archives.
The National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution maintains a database of approximately ten thousand records that represent holdings from its permanent and study collections. This database provides data about each object (accession number, title, sitter, artist, classification, materials, date, dimensions, current owner, acquisition) and, in many cases, a digital surrogate of the object.

Similarly, New York City’s American Museum of Natural History has a project entitled “Amphibian Species of the World.” This project contains a wealth of information about amphibian species, including an extensive bibliography.

Other examples can be found on sites by the National Warplane Museum in Illinois, which includes an online guide to warplanes, aircraft engines, and pilot interviews and stories: the Museum of Television and Radio, which has portions of its collections online; and the National Gallery of Art, which, like the National Portrait Gallery, has an advanced search interface to portions of its collections.

None of these, however, are exhibitions. They are merely collections online.

Archives, too, offer countless collections online. The National Archives and Records Administration provides access to its holdings on the Web as well as documents relating to the census, genealogy, and other topics. The Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution offers online access to records of its collections as well as a few selected documents. Similarly, many university and other specialized archives offer some type of access (online finding aids, database of archival records, full-text rekeyed or scanned documents) from their collections.

None of these, however, are exhibitions. They are merely collections online.

Libraries, through their online catalogs, have been providing some form of remote access to their collections since the early 1990s. If one includes data records in the large international bibliographic utilities such as the Research Library Groups Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN) and OCLC, Inc.’s WorldCat, online access to library collections can be dated to the early 1970s.

More recently, libraries have begun to make the full text of their collections available in an online environment. These digital collections can be large-scale efforts, such as the “Making of America” project from the University of Michigan and Cornell University, which is “a digital library of primary sources in American social history from the antebellum period through reconstruction.” This collection contains over sixteen hundred books and fifty thousand journal articles. Similar projects include the Digital Scriptorium at Duke University, which is “both a physical and ‘virtual’ center in the Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, with offices in the Library and a Web site on the Internet,” and the University of Virginia’s Early American Fiction project, which will eventually contain the full text of 421 works by eighty-one authors.

Other projects are more narrowly focused. For example, the University of California, Berkeley, has among its many online offerings the Online Medieval and Classical Library, which includes such medieval texts as *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, *The Story of the Ere-Dwellers (Eyrbyggja Saga)*, *Orlando Furioso*, and John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. And the Smithsonian Institution Libraries
offers a number of rare natural history, history of science and technology, and anthropology texts online for both the researcher and the casual visitor. An example of a single work comes from Germany, where the Göttingen State and University Library (Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen) has placed a full-text image version of the Göttingen Gutenberg Bible (ca. 1454) online.

Again, however, none of these are exhibitions. They are merely collections online.

Though a collection may have an idea behind it (e.g., the "Making of America" project cited above), what separates an exhibition from a collection is that an exhibition has a tight connection between its idea, objects, and script that ties them all together. It is this tight connection that is vital; otherwise, a virtual exhibition will "amount to little more than disorganized and decontextualized digital collections" (Silver 1997, 826).

TYPES OF EXHIBITIONS

In what ways can this connection between idea, object, and script, so necessary and distinguishing to an online exhibition, be created and maintained? The obvious answer is that you start with a good idea and present the objects that carry through with the idea. Another way is to build themes. If your collections are strong in one particular area, build a whole exhibition around that collection. On the other hand, if you do not have enough objects for a particular theme, you might want to modify your idea by either broadening it or combining it with other ideas (e.g., if you don't have much material on Egypt, do a show on travel literature that will draw from other areas of strength).

In defining your idea, you will need to think about the different effects that you wish the exhibition to create. Though a good exhibition will elicit a range of emotions and reactions from its viewers, in most cases, an exhibition will aim for one particular effect. Five types of exhibition effects that you may wish to consider are

- **Aesthetic**: organized around the beauty of the objects
- **Emotive**: designed to illicit an emotion in the viewer
- **Evocative**: designed to create an atmosphere
- **Didactic**: constructed to teach about something specific
- **Entertaining**: presented just for fun!

An *aesthetic exhibition* is one that exists purely for the sake of presenting beautiful objects. In the case of library and archival exhibitions, the purely aesthetic show may focus on rare materials or prints and photographs. A *Printmaker's Journey: The Graphic Art of Jörg Schmeisser* is a good example of an aesthetic exhibition created by Georgetown University's Lauinger Library. This exhibition, which in its gallery version showed forty-nine intaglio prints by Jörg Schmeisser, the German-born master printmaker and head of printmaking at the Australian National University in Canberra, displays nine of them in the online version. *The Sculpture of Donal Hord*, by the San Diego Historical Society, is an excellent example of an exhibition that primarily explores the aesthetic value of the works on display. Another example is *Duane Hanson: An Exhibition*, from Broward County Libraries (see figure 1). This exhibition moves beyond the purely aesthetic by including a number of supplemental items, such as
models and tools used by the artist. And as a final example, Season’s Greetings: Holiday Cards from the Archives of American Art presents a selection of holiday cards designed by artists from the 1920s through the 1980s.

Emotive exhibits exist primarily to elicit an emotion in the viewer. Many topics could easily fall into this category. They Still Draw Pictures: Drawings Made by Spanish Children during the Spanish Civil War, from the University of California, San Diego, Mandeville Special Collections Library, brings together over six hundred drawings made by children during the Spanish civil war. Originally printed in book form to raise money and support for relief efforts during the war, the online exhibition reproduces the original artworks, which continue to have the power to arouse deep emotions in the viewer. Likewise, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s The Nazi Olympics: Berlin 1936, an exhibition drawn from the museum’s extensive archival holdings, evokes the nationalism and racism in Nazi Germany that led to the Holocaust. A last example, Relief of Pain and Suffering, from the University of California, Los Angeles, Louise M. Darling Biomedical Library’s History and Special Collection, both traces the history of pain relief and draws the viewer into the world of pain itself.

Duane Hanson

An Exhibition of Sculpture, Tools and Accessories, Printed Materials, Models, and Memorabilia from the Collection of Mrs. Duane (Wesla) Hanson

FIGURE 1 | Duane Hanson: An Exhibition. Broward County Libraries Division, Bienes Center for the Literary Arts.
The purpose of an evocative exhibition is to create a specific atmosphere for the viewer. From the National Archives and Records Administration comes *Powers of Persuasion* (see figure 2). This exhibition, with its poster art from the Second World War (and even a war bonds audio file), attempts to bring the viewer into the anxious times that led to the creation of such posters.

Two other exhibitions, *Travel Photographs from the Collections of the Ohio Historical Society* and *Past Perfect: The Jewish Experience in Early-Twentieth-Century Postcards* (from the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary), use, respectively, photographs and postcards to bring to life the past. As the curators of *Past Perfect* note in their introduction to the exhibition, “The colorful images that adorn these postcards afford a nostalgic view into a bygone world.”

On a lighter note, *Sublime Anxiety: The Gothic Family and the Outsider* (from University of Virginia Library, Special Collections) uses an interesting and entertaining mix of graphics and web page layout to evoke the Gothic atmosphere. Included along with traditional examples of the Gothic, contemporary writer Anne Rice and artist Edward Gorey. Curator Natalie Regensburg explains that “the gothic in general, and this exhibition in particular, explores the tension between what we most fear and what we most desire. Its extraordinary popularity today, 200 years after the publication of the first gothic novel, shows us that the concern with freedom and connection is as relevant as it has ever been.”

Though it is hoped that the viewer will learn something from an exhibition (be it virtual or gallery based), in some cases the exhibition will have a specific didactic focus. In a didactic exhibition, the curator aims to teach the viewer about a specific topic. An example of a didactic exhibition from the University of Arizona Library, Special Collections, is *Morris Udall: A Lifetime of Service to Arizona and the United States*. The creators of this exhibition state its purpose as to “present the papers and photographs of the Morris K. Udall Papers held by the University of Arizona Library Special Collections Department. The material in this exhibit will provide the user with an introduction to the collection as well as a sample of selected photographic images.” In this example, a digital collection (the papers of Udall) are supplemented with an online exhibition that provides additional narrative context.

The Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections exhibition *An Online Exhibit of Erotica* explores the “definition of erotica as that which is designed to cause arousal through suggestive rather than explicit portrayal of

![Figure 2](image)

**Figure 2** | *Powers of Persuasion*. United States National Archives and Records Administration.
sexual acts." By focusing on printed works in the collections (erotica, the curators note, is not a specialty of the collections), the exhibition strives to define a relationship between printed and verbal erotica.

A final example, *Paper Dinosaurs, 1824–1969: An Exhibition of Original Publications from the Collections of the Linda Hall Library*, attempts to show how the depiction of dinosaurs in printed materials changed over the course of nearly 150 years. The curators describe how "in spite of the great popularity of dinosaurs, very few people have ever had the opportunity to see firsthand the original publications that revealed dinosaurs to the world. . . . Another problem with encountering the visual history of dinosaur discovery through secondary sources is that many quite significant images have never been reproduced at all."

Whether an exhibition's purpose is to teach or to be a purely aesthetic experience, in nearly every case there is a level of pure entertainment. In many ways, it is the element of entertainment that separates an exhibition from a textbook or a lecture.

Though football is, of course, more then mere entertainment to many, sports of all types can make for very entertaining online exhibitions. From the University of Notre Dame Archives comes *The Notre Dame v. USC Game: 22 October 1977*. This exhibition includes images, film footage, and sound clips of the game in which Notre Dame beat the favored USC Trojans on their way to a national championship.

In the way of pure entertainment, however, the Tufts University Archives has created an online exhibition, *Project Jumbo*, that will serve to forever dispel the notion that archivists and librarians have no sense of humor. The introductory text to the exhibition lays out the bold scope and nature of the exhibition:

> Since the devastating fire of 1975, Tufts has been without its mascot, Jumbo. All that remains of the once proud beast is his tail, carefully preserved in the University Archives. Now, with the miracle of modern technology, comes Project Jumbo, a bold plan to clone the original elephant, starting from his tail, and working upwards to the rest of his body. While most cloning projects attempt to create live animals, Project Jumbo is unique in its attempt to clone an actual stuffed elephant.

On a more literary note, the University Archives of Virginia Tech created *A Gallery of Bloomsday Cards*, an online exhibition of postcards created by T. E. Kennelly in honor of Bloomsday, June 16, the day in the life of Leopold Bloom that James Joyce chronicles in *Ulysses*.

Though an exhibition may have as its focus one of the methods noted above, most exhibitions will, in reality, combine elements from two or more of the types when it is created.

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The best exhibitions, whether they exist in a gallery space or online, start with an idea. The idea, or concept, behind an exhibition is what will set it apart from a random collection of objects or, in the case of an online exhibition, images. An idea, well conceived, thoroughly thought through, properly executed, and carefully illustrated with objects, can provide the visitor not only with an educational experience, but also with an experience that will provoke further exploration of the topic. In the case of an online exhibition, this further exploration may be encouraged through the addition of supplemental materials or hyperlinks to other resources. Visitors to an online exhibition may also be intrigued enough to visit your collection or their own local collections that can assist them in their explorations.

WHERE TO GET IDEAS

According to Plato, an idea is a model or archetype of which things in the real world are but imperfect representations. Though in most cases, our exhibitions will never match the perfect conception we have of them in our mind's eye, the generation of exhibition ideas does not have to rely on shadows cast on the wall of a cave. The topics for an online exhibition are all around us and the materials to make those topics successful exhibitions are on our shelves.

A few general topics for which every library or archive can find materials around which to build an online exhibition include the following:

- Anniversaries of births, deaths, or significant events in people's lives
- Notable events in the life of an institution or region
- Specific materials from certain collections or subcollections
- Themes built around materials in the collection
- Treasures
- Work done by various departments of the library, archives, or other units or departments of the parent institution
- Odd and unusual
Each of these areas can be tailored and focused to reflect the strengths of your individual library or archive. Examples of these themes, with comments on how they can be developed, are detailed below.

**Anniversaries**

Centennials, sesquicentennials, bicentennials, silver and golden anniversaries, diamond jubilees, or any other magic number that ends in a five or zero can be the impetus for an exhibition. An exhibition themed around an anniversary will allow you to revisit the past, highlight current collections or programs, and look forward to the next five, ten, one hundred years!

*From Smithson to Smithsonian: The Birth of an Institution*, an exhibition by Smithsonian Institution Libraries, is a prime example of an anniversary-themed exhibition. Created for the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Smithsonian Institution, *From Smithson to Smithsonian* traces the history of Englishman James Smithson's gift to the United States for the founding of an institution “for the increase and diffusion of knowledge” (see figure 3).

Near the end of the nineteenth century, the World's Columbian Exposition celebrated the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus's contact with the Americas. One hundred years later, the Library of Congress documented the
The quincentenary of this event with 1492: An Ongoing Voyage. An online version of this exhibition was later created that reflected much of the content of the gallery exhibition.

An exhibition from Ohio State University Archives, 1997: A Year of Many Anniversaries, focuses not on a single anniversary but on the year 1997. In that year were anniversaries of nine separate events (ranging from the establishment of Benton County in 1847 to Professor Harold Evans's election to the National Academy of Sciences in 1972) that are documented through a photographic exhibition created from archival holdings.

Notable Events

Major events are perfect topics for online exhibitions. Libraries and archives often hold substantial materials related to significant, interesting, or even sometimes just entertaining events. An event-themed exhibition allows the library or archive to draw on a range of materials and in some cases collaborate with other institutions, such as historical societies, museums, or businesses.

The Chicago Fire, from the Chicago Historical Society, offers an overview of the great fire of 1871. The exhibition tells the story of the fire through photographs and an extensive collection of documents related to the fire, including testimony from Mrs. O'Leary (of cow fame).

Similarly, another event of historic importance, if less well known, is documented in The Capture of Fort William and Mary, New Castle, New Hampshire, December 14–15, 1774, from the University of New Hampshire, Milne Special Collections and Archives.

At the same time, very local events are also suitable for online exhibitions. The Public Library of New Orleans opened a new main library on December 15, 1958, at 219 Loyola Avenue. The exhibition 219 Loyola: Building a Library for New Orleans, created by the New Orleans Public Library, explores the idea of building a new public library by examining (through the use of photographs, archival records, and printed materials) the planning for the new building, the construction, and the public and critical reaction to the structure.

Specific Materials

Special collections are the logical first place to turn when looking for an exhibition topic based on specific types of materials. Examples of special materials include such obvious ones as photographs, sheet music, and manuscripts, but may also include unique collections of postcards, bookbindings, and even postage stamps.

As an example of this last format, the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University Libraries of Notre Dame, has created an exhibition, The Dr. Charles Wolf Collection of Irish Postage Stamps, which centers on an Irish philatelic collection donated by Dr. Charles Wolf.

Maps and other cartographic materials provide a wealth of ideas for online exhibitions. Canada at Scale: Maps of Our History (National Archives of Canada / Archives nationales du Canada; see figure 4), Exploring Africa: An Exhibit of Maps and Travel Narratives (Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina), The Earth and the Heavens: The Art of the Mapmaker (the British Library), Highlights of the Map Collection, National Library of Scotland, and The Cartographic Creation of New England (the Osher Map Library and Smith Center for Cartographic Education, University of Southern Maine) all use maps or cartography as their basic exhibition idea.

The Idea
The range of special materials that appear in online exhibitions reflects the creativity of the exhibitions' creators. For example, postcards form the basis for California Pacific Exposition: San Diego 1935–1936 (San Diego Historical Society); paper bindings are the focus of The Enduring Legacy of Paper Bindings (New York University's Bobst Library); and Soviet children's books take the spotlight in Children's Books of the Early Soviet Era: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow (Rare Books and Special Collections Division, McGill University Libraries).

Perhaps the most common exhibition idea is the themed exhibition. This type of exhibition will be built around a specific idea and designed to develop that idea. Themes can range from individuals to professions, poems, social movements or phenomena, collectors, and specific media.

Dr. Seuss Went to War: A Catalog of Political Cartoons by Dr. Seuss, from the Mandeville Special Collections Library, University of California, San Diego, is an example of a very specific theme: the wartime cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel. Arranged in chronological order, the cartoons show a side of Dr. Seuss that is not often seen. Similarly, Churchill: The Evidence, from the Churchill Archives Center, traces the life and times of Winston Churchill.

More examples of exhibitions that use as their idea a specific theme include Connies (State Library of Victoria, Australia), which celebrates Melbourne's tram conductors; The Night before Christmas by Clement C. Moore, Illustrated (Brown University Library; see figure 5), which uses an array of illustrations from the poem; and Girls Fight for a Living (created for Women's History Month by the University of Louisville Special Collections), which draws on a number of resources to examine the role of women in the workplace.

For an example of a medium used as the basis for an exhibition theme, one can look at The History of Railway Photography (Library Archive, The National Railway Museum, Great Britain). Because the exhibition relies exclusively on photographs to tell the story of British railways, its dual themes, railways and photographs, are focused and direct.
A special subsection of the themed exhibition is the exhibition that highlights treasures of a collection. How different institutions will define just what part of their collections are their treasures varies greatly. The Library of Congress's American Treasures of the Library of Congress is an exhibition of documents such as Lincoln's first draft of the Gettysburg Address, Lafayette's copy of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and Jefferson's draft of the Virginia Constitution (see figure 6). By any measure, these are unique treasures and ideal for online exhibitions. However, a wide range of materials can serve as the basis for treasure exhibitions. Other national and state libraries have mounted such exhibitions. A few additional examples include Treasures of the Royal Library, from the State Library of Denmark, and Treasures from Europe's National Libraries, from the Conference of European National Librarians.

The American Philosophical Society, in the exhibition Treasures of the APS, defines as treasures any items that stand out for the "extraordinary stories they tell about the history of this nation, the workings of science, or the culture in which we live." The Library of Virginia, in the exhibition The Common Wealth: Treasures from the Collections of the Library of Virginia, places "personal photographs, business records, and family histories that document the lives of all Virginians" in the treasure category. In a similar vein, Treasures of Florida Libraries: A Celebration of Rare and Unique Materials, from the University of Miami Library, brings together a host of materials from twenty-nine Florida libraries. On a much smaller scale is the University of Kansas Libraries' Irish Treasures from the O'Hegarty Irish Collection. This exhibition displays eighteen images from the libraries' Irish collection.
Of the more than 121 million items in the Library of Congress, which are considered "treasures"? Of course Thomas Jefferson's handwritten draft of the Declaration of Independence is a treasure, not only because of its association with Jefferson but also because of what it reveals about how one of the founding documents of America was written and rewritten and finally agreed upon by dozens of men in the midst of a political crisis.

But what about Jelly Roll Morton's early compositions? Or Maya Lin's original drawing for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial? Or one of the earliest known baseball cards? Or the first motion picture deposited for copyright? The Library holds all these and more.

Thomas Jefferson, whose personal library became the core of the Library of Congress, arranged his books into three types of knowledge, corresponding to Francis Bacon's three faculties of the mind: Memory (History), Reason (Philosophy), and Imagination (Fine Arts).

Although the Library organizes its immense collections according to a system created at the end of the 1800s, the treasures in this exhibition have been placed in the same categories that Jefferson would have used, had he been deciding where to put Alexander Graham Bell's lab notebook or George Gershwin's full orchestral score for Porgy and Bess.

**EXHIBITION SECTIONS**

- Exhibition Overview - Top Treasures
- Memory - Reason - Imagination

A much different approach to the treasures concept was taken by Texas A&M University's Cushing Library. In the exhibition *Fruits of a Research Collection*, the uses of a special collection for nontraditional research are highlighted. Steven E. Smith, Special Collections Librarian, noted that the “collections . . . have also been used by many . . . people for many other purposes—for example, journalists writing articles for national magazines, film producers creating documentaries, student groups making t-shirts, and book editors in search of cover art.”

**Work Done**

An exhibition that focuses on the work done at the library or archive or at the parent institution can serve many purposes. In addition to bringing publicity to an area of the institution, an online exhibition that highlights, say, recent acquisitions or a new building will help to raise staff morale. The ability to take something like a recent acquisition or a quick library history and turn it into an online exhibition or display can often be done simply and by staff who may not regularly work on full-fledged gallery exhibitions. A fine example of a library history exhibition comes from Houston Public Library. This exhibition, the *History of the Houston Public Library*, is a simple narrative history of the library interspersed with photographs of the library’s various buildings, events, and staff.

A much different approach to this type of exhibition idea is seen in *Keeping Our Word: Preserving Information across the Ages* from the University of Iowa Libraries. This exhibition, which “celebrates the myriad efforts made over time to preserve information,” both serves as an exhibition of the work being done in preservation at the University of Iowa Libraries and provides a fascinating overview of the preservation of library and archival materials.

In addition to being able to celebrate their own work and staff, libraries and archives are often in a unique position to highlight the history of their parent institutions or their staff. The Perry Library at Old Dominion University and the Harvey Library at Hampton University worked together to create *From Exposition to Development: The Legacy of Composers at Hampton University*, which uses images and archival documents to trace the contributions of five composers to the music composition heritage of Virginia.

**Odd and Unusual**

Though all of the above make wonderful topics for online exhibitions, sometimes it is the odd and the unusual that will both educate and entertain your online exhibition visitors. A good example of this is *Celebrating the Boar* from the University of Waterloo Library. Taking as its starting point a seven-hundred-pound bronze boar statue donated by a faculty member, the exhibition goes on to examine the role of the boar in art and history.

Only from Las Vegas could come the exhibition *Dino at the Sands*, an exploration of the life and career of Dean Martin from the UNLV Libraries Special Collections (see figure 7). A similar exhibition, *The Jackie Gleason Collection*, from the University of Miami's Otto G. Richter Library, focuses not on the entertainer's show business career but rather on his collection of occult and parapsychology materials, which he donated to the library.
ALL EXHIBITION IDEAS’ TIME IS NOT RIPE

Michael Belcher (1991, 37), in Exhibitions in Museums, defines an exhibition as “showing for a purpose,” the purpose being to affect the viewer in some predetermined way. Though we have outlined a host of potential ideas, it needs to be said that not all ideas are created equal and that some ideas are best left in the closet of their thinker’s mind, never to see the light of day, virtual or otherwise.

An idea might not be suitable for an exhibition for a number of reasons. The library or archive may not have, or may not be able to borrow the proper objects to see the idea through to completion. In other cases, the objects themselves may not be suitable for use in an exhibition. The fragility of an object is of less concern in an online exhibition than in a gallery exhibition. Still, the physical state of an object may keep it from being either directly digitized or photographed for secondary digitization.

Lastly, even the best of ideas cannot be converted into an online exhibition if the proper support and staff are not behind it.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE EXHIBITION IDEA

Rare is the idea that, like Athena, springs forth fully formed from the head of Zeus. Once the initial idea for an exhibition is settled on, the idea will need to be further developed. Development includes vigorously analyzing the idea and teasing out all its possibilities. Examine the idea from all sides and angles to see what additional elements can be added from the collections to flesh it out in an online environment.

Librarians and archivists, particularly special collections librarians and curators, can never hope to “fling wide the golden gates and let the public in” (Low 1942, 7) to the totality of their collections. With the right idea and the proper execution, however, your collections can take on a new life and generate a whole new audience.

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  http://www.churchill.nls.ac.uk

  http://www.lva.lib.va.us/sb/exhibits/treasures/index.htm

*Connies.* State Library of Victoria (Australia).

*Dino at the Sands.* UNLV Libraries Special Collections.
  http://library.nevada.edu/speccol/dino/index.html

*The Dr. Charles Wolf Collection of Irish Postage Stamps.* Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Notre Dame Library.
  http://www.rarebooks.nd.edu/stamps/trish

*Dr. Seuss Went to War: A Catalog of Political Cartoons by Dr. Seuss.* University of California, San Diego, Mandeville Special Collections Library.
  http://orpheus.ucsd.edu/speccoll/dspolitic/index.htm
http://portico.bl.uk/exhibitions/maps

The Enduring Legacy of Paper Bindings. New York University, Fales Library and Special Collections.
http://www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/research/preserv/lecture/paper.htm

Exploring Africa: An Exhibit of Maps and Travel Narratives. University of South Carolina, Thomas Cooper Library.
http://www.sc.edu/library/spcoll/sccoll/africa/africa.html

http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/1492/intro.html

From Exposition to Development: The Legacy of Composers at Hampton University. Perry Library at Old Dominion University and Harvey Library at Hampton University.
http://www.lib.edu.edu/aboutlib/musiclib/exhibits/hamptonex/mlinex.html

From Smithsonian to Smithsonian. Smithsonian Institution Libraries.
http://www.sil.si.edu/Exhibitions/Smithson-to-Smithsonian

Fruits of a Research Collection. Texas A&M University, Cushing Library.
http://library.tamu.edu/cushing/mlinex/fruits/intro.html

http://atena.louisville.edu/library/ekstrom/special/girls/girls.html

http://www.nls.ac.uk/digitallibrary/map/map.htm

The History of Railway Photography. National Railway Museum (Great Britain).
http://www.nrm.org.uk/html/exh_pb/photo/start.htm

History of the Houston Public Library. Houston Public Library.
http://sparc.hpl.lib.tx.us/hpl/libhist.html

Irish Treasures from the O’Hegarty Irish Collection. University of Kansas Libraries, Department of Special Collections of the Kenneth Spencer Research Library.
http://www.spencer.lib.ku.edu/exhibits/irish_treasures/shamrock.html

http://www.library.miami.edu/archives/jg/index.html
http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/ref/exhibit/index.html

http://www.brown.edu/Facilities/University_Library/exhibits/TNBC/tnbc.html

http://osu.orst.edu/Dept/archives/exhibits/yrspast/yrspast.htm

http://www.ddb.de/gabriel/treasures/entree.html

http://www.library.miami.edu/treasure/treasure.html

Treasures of the APS. American Philosophical Society.
http://www.amphilsoc.org/library/exhibits/treasures

http://www.kb.dk/kultur/expo/klenod

http://nutrias.org/~nopl/exhibits/219/219.htm
CHAPTER 3

Executing the Exhibition Idea

The people's museum should be much more than a house full of specimens in glass cases. It should be a house full of ideas, arranged with the strictest attention to system.—George Brown Goode

Once you have a general idea of a concept that will form an online exhibition, you will need to analyze the exhibition idea. Focus on the key elements of the idea, the objects, and the script that will transform the idea into an exhibition. In some cases, what you once thought to be a great idea will fall short when you find that you do not have the objects to support the idea. At other times, the idea and the objects are in place, but an adequate exhibition script cannot be created to properly tie everything together. In the worst cases, objects and script will fail the idea (whatever were you thinking in the first place?), and in the best of cases, objects and script will fall together almost as if by magic and the online exhibition will appear to the world in a wondrous digital epiphany. (Note: this will not happen very often!)

The exhibition planning process is composed of a number of distinct steps. In the case of libraries and archives with an ongoing gallery exhibition program, many of the planning steps may already be outlined in internal policies and procedures. With a little bit of adaptation, these policies and procedures may be adapted to reflect the special needs of online exhibitions.

Some of the general steps that should be followed in an online exhibition planning process include:

- Preparation of the exhibition proposal
- Proposal evaluation
- Selection of objects
- Drafting of the script
- Preparation of objects
- Exhibition design and Web creation
- Final editing
- Additions, changes, corrections
A key component of any exhibition program, either gallery based or virtual, is a clear and well-defined exhibition policy. A good exhibition policy will lay out the mission and goals of a library or archives exhibition program and allow staff to have a clear idea of what is expected in an exhibition and how it fits into the larger mission of the institution.

An exhibition policy should explain how exhibitions contribute to outreach and the presentation of library and archival materials often not available to a larger audience. The exhibition policy can also explain how the selection of books, manuscripts, graphics, and objects will address topics of historical and cultural interest. How proposals are evaluated (whether by the director, an exhibition officer, or a team assigned exhibition responsibilities) is important. A collegiality in proposal review with the opportunity for potential curators to receive feedback on their proposals will increase the quality of all ensuing exhibitions. Though some proposals will be accepted quickly without further review or revision, at other times, the kernel of a good idea will be present in a proposal but will need further development before it can grow into a viable online exhibition. Any proposal evaluation should have in place a methodology for nurturing promising, but presently lacking, proposals. And lastly, the policy should outline staff responsibilities, standards, and general formats that should be employed in the exhibitions.

A library and archival exhibition policy could address the elements below. (Though many of these elements will be relevant to both gallery and online exhibitions, the online elements will be the major focus.)

Purpose. What are the reasons for creating exhibitions in your institution? Examples might include promoting interest in the collections, presenting rare or fragile materials, or educating users in the use of the collections.

Content. What type of content will be used in the exhibitions? Generally, the majority of the objects in an exhibition will be from the library or archive itself. To address cases in which objects may be borrowed from other institutions or from individuals, the policy may comment on the balance of borrowed versus owned objects that will be displayed.

Standards. What are the standards (in terms of intellectual content, presentation, and so forth) that will be used for your institution’s exhibitions? A few standards that you may keep in mind that may automatically apply to your exhibitions include those related to accessibility (how the exhibition program will comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act regulations) and other policies or directives your library or archive (or their parent institution) maintains in regard to exhibitions.

Authority and Responsibility. An exhibition policy must clearly outline the areas of responsibility for exhibitions. In most cases, the director will have final authority and responsibility for the library’s or archive’s exhibitions (that’s why they get paid more than the rest of us!). The director, however, will delegate the work to appropriate staff, reserving final approval for him- or herself. An administrative librarian or officer will need to have duties such as budgeting, staffing, and other coordinating functions. In institutions with large and ongoing exhibition programs (most gallery exhibition programs), an exhibitions officer will manage the day-to-day running of the exhibition program. Responsibilities in this area would include content management (approving and
The Exhibition Proposal

With the guidance of an exhibition policy in place, the first step for exhibition planners will be the writing of an exhibition proposal. Even in those cases where a formal proposal does not need to be submitted to the institution's administration, writing a proposal can help to clarify the exhibition in the curator's mind, guide the ongoing creation of the exhibition, and, in some necessary cases, stop work on the idea. Additionally, a good proposal will help with any fund-raising if supplemental funds are needed for the exhibition.

Among the elements of a good exhibition proposal are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and theme</th>
<th>Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Timeline(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Preliminary object list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Title and Theme.** Though an exhibition is not a dissertation or even a book on a subject, its title should strive to convey what it is all about. There should also be a short summary of the themes presented in the exhibition.

**Purpose.** What is the purpose of this exhibition? Is it merely pretty pictures? Or does it strive to tell a story? In this portion of the proposal you should discuss the idea behind the exhibition (an anniversary, a notable event, specific materials, a theme, treasures) and the approach that will be taken (aesthetic, emotive, evocative, didactic, entertaining).

**Audience.** There are many potential audiences for an online exhibition, and it will be impossible for any single exhibition to target them all. The more clearly your audience is defined, the more focused the exhibition will become. When thinking about audience, keep in mind such issues as local versus global appeal, knowledge levels about the subject, reading levels, and language. Recognition and understanding of the audience for your exhibition (whether a current audience that you hope to retain or a new audience that you are cultivating) is important. On the one hand, do not focus on so narrow an audience that your exhibition appeals to only a few visitors. On the other hand, “the whole world” is not a good choice either. Though a single exhibition will never be able to meet the needs and expectations of all potential audiences, remember that with the Web, much of your work can easily be repurposed. In many cases, the same images can be used for exhibition scripts that target different audiences. Lastly, one should consider both the technical skills and the hardware/software/bandwidth capabilities of your potential audience.
Design. Though each exhibition will (and should) have its own unique look and feel, in many instances there will be a house style that will be adhered to for at least certain elements (for example, the use and placement of institutional logos or color schemes). A good exhibition proposal, however, will include some notion of what the curator has in mind for the presentation of his or her idea. This will be of assistance to the designer at a later point in the exhibition process.

Maintenance. The Web does not set a single version of an exhibition in stone. An exhibition has an opening date (when it will become available to the public), but it need never close. The temptation of the relative ease with which an online exhibition may be edited or corrected can lead to an expectation that elements can be changed or added to later. Some types of exhibitions will be greatly enhanced by periodic updating and refreshing. If the curator feels that the exhibition has the potential of benefiting from updating, this should be noted in the proposal. Curators, should, however, beware the example of Henry James, whose rewriting and editing of his early novels (when they were republished in the New York edition near the end of his life) are frowned upon by both scholars and the common reader.

Staff. The curator should note what staff in addition to him- or herself may need to work on the project. In institutions with formerly established exhibition teams or committees this will be an easier process. Remember that teams can offer staff a chance to exercise talents and exhibit creativity not shown in day-to-day work. Potential makeup of such teams is noted in chapter 4.

Budget. The curator should make an estimate of any unusual needs or services that the exhibition may necessitate. Standard and usual costs associated with digitizing (which will be outlined later) probably will not need to be noted at this point. If, however, the curator is expecting to utilize new or different technologies that have not been used in past exhibitions (audio and video being two examples), a note on potential monetary and staff-time investments should be made.

Timeline(s). In libraries and archives, the majority of curators are going to have regular, full-time jobs (cataloger, reference librarian, collection processor). Creating an online exhibition can be a time-consuming and intellectually laborious task. A good proposal will take into account work and life and present a firm timeline for delivering scripts, script revisions, and supplemental materials (bibliographies and the like) to the design staff.

Preliminary Object List. A list of objects (books, manuscripts, photographs, and so forth) that the curator plans to put in the exhibition will help the reader picture how the objects will flesh out the narrative of the script. In most cases, the object list does not have to be complete or thorough. As the script develops, objects may be added or dropped from the exhibition. In some instances, an object may need to be replaced when it is found to be unsuitable for digitizing; in others, the story of an object may not contribute to the totality of the exhibition's narrative.

A thorough and well-planned exhibition proposal will make the task of creating the online exhibition easier for all involved. Spending extra time during the proposal stage will save time later, when the final presentation of the exhibition is actually executed. For an example of an online exhibition proposal, see appendix A.
Once your exhibition proposal has been accepted and the wheels of the exhibition have been set in motion, it's time to start to work on the script and the final selection of objects. As you begin to work more closely with the ideas and the objects, you will need to determine an organizational structure for your exhibition.

Gallery exhibitions are spaces where visitors may move freely (even exhibitions with strong linear arrangements that take a visitor on a path through the display). Instead of following the strict, conventional narrative of a novel (or television program or movie), gallery exhibitions, with their ability to allow the viewer to pick and choose what to read, what objects to look at, and what order to look at objects in, present, in a sense, a form of hypernarrative more akin to web browsing.

In a gallery exhibition, visitors are tempted by other exhibitions, restaurants, gift shops, and rest rooms. Similarly, in an online exhibition, the visitors' ability to move around the site (and even off the site!) makes some sort of organization necessary to keep them from getting lost.

As with gallery exhibitions, there are numerous possibilities for organizing your idea and objects. Among these possibilities are:

- Object-oriented organization
- Systematic organization
- Thematic organization
- Organization by material type
- Organization by multiple schemes

*Object-Oriented Organization.* In an object-oriented exhibition, there is a simple presentation of the objects with little systematic organization. In an exhibition of this type, the objects and their descriptions remain the chief focus. Though there may be some sort of simple organization (such as alphabetical or chronological), the organization remains secondary to the presentation of the objects. Exhibitions devoted to treasures or recent acquisitions make good candidates for this method of organization. An example of an object-oriented exhibition is *Recent Acquisitions in NCSU Libraries' Special Collections, 1998–1999,* from North Carolina State University. In this exhibition, 16 of the 550 new acquisitions from the NSCU Special Collections are highlighted in a simple presentation with a few images and a short descriptive text.

*Systematic Organization.* A systematically organized exhibition can be arranged in a variety of ways. A common form of systematic organization is *chronological order.* Chronological exhibitions tell their story by starting at the beginning (a very good place to start!) and moving through time to the end. Among the many examples of a chronological exhibition are *Reflections in Time,* from Middle Tennessee State University. This exhibition traces the history and growth of the university from 1911 through 1999 in photographs, objects, and other material. Another form of a systematic organization is *taxonomic,* where related objects are grouped together (either directly or through hierarchies). *Daughter of Earth: Agnes Smedley and Smedley-Mackinnon Collections,* from the Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Arizona State University Libraries, gives a brief view of the life of the famous radical. Topics such as “College Life” and “In China” are used to outline Smedley's story. Groups of photographs are arranged on each topic.
Thematic Organization. A thematically organized exhibition is structured around themes and/or tells a story. *Oveta Culp Hobby, the Little Colonel*, from the Woodson Research Center, Special Collections at Fondren Library, Rice University, explores the life of Hobby, the first director of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). Through a narrative structure interspersed with photographs and documents, the viewer can explore the early history of the WAACs as well as Hobby's life. Another thematic exhibition is *Science and the Artist's Book*, from Smithsonian Institution Libraries (see figure 8). This exhibition is built around the theme of artists' books inspired by volumes from the Heralds of Science collection of the Dibner Library of the History of Science and Technology.

![Science and the Artist's Book](image)

**FIGURE 8** | *Science and the Artist's Book.* Courtesy Smithsonian Institution Libraries.

Organization by Material Type. In some exhibitions, organizing all the objects by their original material type will provide the viewer with the best presentation. *Nos Los Inquisidores*, from the Department of Special Collections of the University Libraries of Notre Dame, is built around a selection from the 564 objects in the Harley L. McDevitt Inquisition Collection (see figure 9). Arrangement by such topics as “Indices of Banned Books,” “Autos-da-fé,” and “Official Publications” allows the viewer to explore the exhibition not in a strict linear manner but by picking and choosing from the types of materials available.

**FIGURE 9** | *Nos Los Inquisidores.* Reproduced with permission from the website of the Department of Special Collections of the University Libraries of Notre Dame.

Execution the Exhibition Idea
In *Frontier Photographer: Edward S. Curtis* (figure 10), from Smithsonian Institution Libraries, for example, the viewer can follow a roughly chronological progression of Curtis’s life or jump around through such categories as “Early Life,” “Family Sacrifices,” “Early Books,” and “Alaska.”

It is important to remember that you must try and maintain a coherent organization to your exhibition. An exhibition without a major organizing principle can often degenerate into a mere random collection of images or provide the viewer with so many choices for navigating the site that there is no clear vision of the exhibition’s theme.

![Frontier Photographer Edward S. Curtis](image)

**FIGURE 10 |** *Frontier Photographer: Edward S. Curtis.* Courtesy Smithsonian Institution Libraries.

**SELECTION OF OBJECTS**

*Museum exhibitions remind one of a quick-lunch bar, where the guests see not only what they consume, but can also discern the ingredients of which the food is being prepared.*—Emil Horn

What menu choices do you want to offer at the lunch counter of your online exhibition? Or, more precisely, what types of objects should one put in an exhibition? Obviously, the choices will be made from your collections (or from objects borrowed from other collections) that illustrate the theme of your exhibition. The ancillary criteria that go into selecting objects for an exhibition,
and especially for an online exhibition, however, are quite varied and should be explored in greater detail. The visitor will be attracted to dramatic objects when presented with a host of them to look at in greater detail (Belcher 1991, 111). Or, as similarly stated by John Cotton Dana, librarian and museum pioneer, "objects are silent" (1927, 16).

A stunning and dramatic object can, even in an online exhibition, leave vivid impressions on the viewer. Library and archival objects are in many ways well suited to online presentation. Unlike the majority of three-dimensional artifacts found in the typical museum exhibition, books, manuscripts, photographs, and other basically flat materials do not lose as much of their presence when rendered as images on a screen. This is not to say, however, that viewing a page of the Book of Kells or the Declaration of Independence in 75 dpi on a 15-inch monitor will ever provide the same thrill as viewing those items in person.

Now, for a quick vocabulary lesson. What is the difference between an exhibit and an exhibition? In the common parlance (and even frequently in museum publications), the two words are interchangeable. For purposes of clarity, however, the following distinctions between the two should be made: an exhibit is "one element or component of a larger group or a single, stand-alone experience"; an exhibition is a "group of elements, planned as a cohesive unit, under a specified theme or topic" (Serrell 1998, 12). In this section, the terms exhibit and object are used interchangeably.

Object Selection

Belcher (1991, 147) notes that the “most likely reasons for selecting an object for exhibition are that, in the opinion of the curator, the object is intrinsically of interest, or information about it is considered of value to the visitor, or the object has a contribution to make to a more general story which the visitor is to be told.”

In most instances, the idea for the exhibition, the definition of the idea, and the selection of the objects are all closely related to one another as well as to the writing of the script. What, however, lies behind the selection of certain objects for certain exhibitions? A few quotations from selected exhibitions may offer some enlightenment.

For an exhibition of Whitman materials, the curators selected “artifacts of a fascinating and extremely dynamic period of American publishing history” (Walt Whitman and the Development of “Leaves of Grass,” University of South Carolina Libraries, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections). From The Writings of Paul Laurence Dunbar exhibition at a public library comes this statement on object selection: “Springfield Library’s Rare Book and Special Collections room is fortunate to own seventeen first editions of Dunbar’s books, published during his lifetime. This represents the vast majority of the books issued before his death. The purpose of this exhibit is to display these wonderful books together and simultaneously inspire a renewal of interest in this important American poet and novelist.”

As a last example, the Yale University Library’s exhibition A Great Assemblage: An Exhibit of Judaica (figure 1.1) notes that the objects were selected in the hope that the exhibition will “present in miniature the depth and richness of Yale’s vast Hebraica and Judaica holdings.”
Preparation of Objects

Once the first selection of objects for an exhibition has been made, preparation of those objects for digitization can begin. Details about the actual digitization of objects will be discussed later, but two things to keep in mind as objects are selected are as follows:

Will the object need any special conservation treatment before it can be used for the exhibition?

Is the object needed for any other purpose for which its absence during the digitization process will cause a hardship?

In the case of a gallery exhibition that will simultaneously become an online exhibition, it is extremely important that the objects be either digitized...
or photographed well before they will be needed for the installation of the gallery exhibition.

Now, with your idea in place, your proposal approved, and your preliminary list of objects prepared, it's time to start the real work, the writing of the script.

As you begin to write the script, if you keep your organization in mind, the process will move along more easily because you can use the organization as a sort of outline. The preparation of the script itself will fall roughly into four areas:

- Original draft
- Approval process
- Additions/changes/corrections
- Final draft

Elements of the Script

Like any form of writing, an exhibition script has a number of predefined elements that nearly all scripts will include. Depending upon the nature of your exhibition, you may choose to exclude certain of these elements; however, in nearly all instances, you will include most of the following:

- Narrative
- Pull quotes
- Object labels
- Object captions
- Statement of authorship or responsibility
- Credits and acknowledgments

When you first approach a gallery exhibition, you will often find on the wall outside the gallery text that provides a general introduction to the exhibition. As you move through the gallery space, you will find additional text that moves you through the exhibition or that provides transition between different segments of the exhibition. This portion of the script is the narrative. For the viewer, narrative text both outlines and ties together the objects in the exhibition. In the New York Public Library's exhibition The Romanovs: Their Empire, Their Books. The Political, Religious, Cultural, and Social Life of Russia's Imperial House, a brief narrative text provides the transition between the major sections of the exhibition:

Up to the fall of the Romanovs in 1917, the Russians were the largest population group in the empire. Their representation and ways were therefore of prime interest to members of the dynasty. Among the more than one hundred other peoples or ethnic groups in the empire, only a few seemed significant enough—by virtue of their location, numbers, or quaintness—to deserve attention, so imperial libraries contain only a limited and very selective literature dealing with them. Travel books enabled their owners to extend their knowledge and to document their own visits to some regions of the realm.
The narrative portion of your script is where you will begin to assemble the research and data collected during exhibition planning and where you will further develop the statement that reflects the theme chosen for the exhibition.

*Pull quotes*, text taken from the narrative of the script or from objects, often serve as transitions between portions of narrative text. They can also highlight the themes, ideas, and structure of the exhibition. When doing research for the exhibition, the curator should be on the lookout for appropriate quotes or catchy text that can be used as exhibition pull quotes. Numerous examples of pull quotes may be found in *Frontier Photographer: Edward S. Curtis* from Smithsonian Institution Libraries.

Object labels and object captions are closely related but serve different purposes. An *object caption* is often a brief bit of text, as in this example from the Maine Historical Society's *Rum, Riot, and Reform: Maine and the History of American Drinking*:

**Bangor House**
Joseph F. Hatch, 1883
Oil on canvas
Collections of the Bangor Historical Society

From the same exhibition comes the accompanying *object label*:

Maine's grand city hotel is said to have always served liquor by simply paying fines as the cost of doing business.
In Portland, J. B. Brown's Falmouth Hotel reportedly practiced the same method.

The object caption is just that, a brief summary that explains what the object is, where it comes from, and in some cases, its media and format. In an online exhibition, object captions will generally appear as text located near the image of the object. Additionally, in many cases, the caption text will be embedded in the digital image. A chief benefit of embedding caption information in the digital image is that often visitors may stumble upon the images via search engines or in some other manner. When caption information is embedded in the image, if the object is ever orphaned, the viewer will have some idea of what it is and where it came from. See, for example, figure 12, which shows an embedded caption from the Smithsonian Institution Libraries' exhibition "Make the Dirt Fly!"

Basic information that you must present for each object in your online exhibition (either in the object caption itself or in a linked file) includes

What it is
Where it is
Credit and copyright information

**What It Is.** For books, this information should include, at minimum, author, title, and year of publication. If more space is available, you may also want to include publisher, place of publication, original size, and similar useful facts. For other types of objects (manuscripts, photographs, and so forth), be as inclusive yet as concise as possible. Remember that with an online exhibition, you can easily accommodate a checklist of objects displayed. That is where you can let your catalogers run wild and include thorough and comprehensive bibliographic citations.
Where It Is. Is the item from your own collections? Don’t assume the viewer will just know. Also, don’t assume that all your visitors will know that the original photographs are held in special collections, the photo archive, or other specialty locations. Give as much information as possible on where in your collections a given object resides so that viewers can visit your library to see the object in person. Or, if you ever need to retrieve the specific item, a call number or other specific locator for the item should be included.

Credit and Copyright Information. Given the slough of copyright rules and regulations, it is best to include a statement of some sort cleared through your institution’s legal counsel. For objects borrowed from other institutions (and for which you received permission for inclusion in an online exhibition), your lending agreement may require a very specific credit line. Examples of credit lines include:

Collections of Suzanne Messier, Michel-Pierre Sarrazin, Loto-Québec, René Derouin, and Glenbow Museum (from the exhibition Frontiers, Frontières, Fronteras: René Derouin)

Courtesy of Ianus Publications (from the exhibition Out of This World: Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy)

Early Printed Collections, The British Library (from the exhibition John Bull and Uncle Sam: Four Centuries of British-American Relations)

For nonbook or archival objects, include as much information as possible to help in identification (as in the caption for the bill hopper in figure 13). Answer the following questions about the object (as appropriate): What is it? When was it made? What is it made of? How was it made? Where was it made? What is its function? What is its significance? What is its physical description (size, weight, other dimensions)? (Belcher 1991, 151, 153).

The object label differs from the object caption in that it provides more extensive and contextualized information about an object. When writing your object labels, remember, as quoted previously from John Cotton Dana, that objects are silent. In an online exhibition, the object label takes on additional importance, as viewers will not have key visual cues to assist them with understanding an object. For example, in the Smithsonian Institution Libraries’
exhibition From Smithsonian to Smithsonian, what at first glance appears to be a chair of indeterminate size becomes, once one has read the object label and caption, a Senate bill hopper (see figure 13).

Object Caption
Senate Bill Hopper
Mahogany, 1838–1846
190.5h × 59.4w × 59.7d cm (75h × 23 3/8w × 23 1/2d in)

Object Label
This U.S. Senate bill hopper offers clear evidence of how few bills actually became law. The upper shelves—which represent the final phases of legislative consideration—were built to accommodate the fewest bills.

Everyone likes to get credit for the work they’ve done. In an online exhibition, however, it is necessity and not vanity that dictates the including of a statement of authorship or responsibility. An online exhibition, like any exhibition or other work of scholarly or entertainment value, draws its validity from who created it. To take an extreme example, The Many Talents of John Gorham Palfrey, Our First Dean, from Andover-Harvard Theological Library, has much more respectability because of its association with the library and a named curator (Clifford Wunderlich) than it would have if it had been done by, say, a Yale Bulldog frat house. Remember the old Internet joke: ‘On the internet, no one knows you’re a dog.’ By the same token, to establish identity and validity, you must take pains to announce that you are not just any old dog, but a Westminster Kennel Club Champion!

Credits and acknowledgments can be separated into two sections or kept as a single, integrated whole. Credits will be used specifically to thank those that assisted with the preparation of the exhibition. It is here where the different members of the exhibition team can be credited for their work. The acknowledgments section is where other staff members who may have made a contribution to the exhibition (such as the student assistants who helped with the research and the staff who went out of their way to help you find just the right book for the exhibition) can be thanked. It is also where institutions that receive additional financial support for the online exhibition (or for the original gallery exhibition upon which the online version may have been based) may thank donors.

Note: the entire issue of providing benefactors' names in an online environment can be a tricky one. You may wish to check with your legal counsel or development office on policies and procedures for crediting supporters online.
Revision of the Script

Once you have completed the entire script (narrative, labels, captions, and all), it is time to begin the reviewing process. In some institutions or for certain types of exhibitions that may be culturally or politically sensitive, you may wish to have the script reviewed by an outside expert. Complex exhibitions that propound new or revised scholarly theory may benefit from a peer review process, as used for articles in professional journals. Any appropriate suggestions, comments, changes, or corrections should then be incorporated into the script.

After the intellectual content and organization of the script is settled on, make certain that your script gets a thorough review for spelling and grammar. You may also wish to run the script through a second level of fact checking at this point. (How many times do you have to remind yourself whether it was synthetic or analytic cubism that came first?)

When doing the final review, keep in mind the flow of the script. The flow will include the interrelationship of all the parts of the exhibition as well as the overall clarity of the presentation and the relationship of the parts to the theme.

See appendix B for a sample exhibition script.

A Further Discussion of Exhibit Labels

Before we proceed to our next topic, a further discussion of the art of writing exhibit labels is in order. As George Brown Goode noted in 1891 (432), “each object must bear a label, giving its name and history so fully that all the probable questions of the visitor are answered in advance.” Literally dozens of books and many dozens of articles have been written on how to create exhibit labels.

Those who write museum labels for a living will tell you that it is its own unique art form and perhaps should exist as its own genre, like fiction, poetry, and advertising. The form and function of the mode of communication makes all the difference. In the case of a book, the author uses many thousands of words to get across his purpose (whether it is to inform or to entertain); in a poem, the poet typically uses far fewer words but often has ideas that are just as complex or even more complex to communicate. In an advertisement, the number of words may be negligible, but each word must sell the product. In an exhibit label, the number of words is similar to that of a poem or an advertisement, and those words must, on some levels, both communicate a complex idea and sell a product (in this case, keep the attention of the viewer). At the same time, the label must be “interesting, readable, legible, and deserving of visitors’ attention” (Serrell 1982, v). Also remember that, as David Bearman (1995) has noted, “people do not want the things in themselves, they want the meaning they convey.”

Beverly Serrell, who has written extensively on exhibit labels, enumerates eight deadly sins of exhibit labels. Though some of those sins pertain only to gallery exhibitions, many of the flaws of a bad gallery label can be replicated online. Serrell (1982, 19) specifically criticizes labels that are

Too long and wordy
Too technical for the intended readers
Boring, with inappropriate information
Badly edited, with mistakes in grammar, spelling, or syntax
Too small—tiny words crammed on a three-inch-by-five-inch card
Hard to read (the result of poor typography)
Colored in a way that makes reading difficult or tiresome
Badly placed, causing neck, back, or eye strain in the viewer

Likewise, Stephen C. Bitgood (1986, 3–9) has commented on the factors that are important in creating a successful exhibit label. Bitgood delineates four groups that need to be considered in the writing of exhibit labels. They are visitors, staff, content experts, and stylistic experts. Each of these groups will have a different stake in the content and formulation of a label. When considering the visitor, the writer thinks about the number of visitors or viewers that will actually read a particular label, the amount of time a visitor will spend reading the label (its holding power), the knowledge a visitor will gain from the label, and whether the information on the label will stimulate the visitor to delve deeper into the subject (or at least continue with the exhibition).

For the other groups, there will be different consideration. For staff (and in the case of an online exhibition, this would include the creators of the exhibition as well as other library or archives staff who may view the exhibition), the content and attractiveness of the label are important. For content experts (who may reside within your institution or be visitors who find your exhibition somewhere on the Web), the key element of an exhibit label is the accuracy of its facts. For the stylistic expert, a label will fail if it does not conform to acceptable standards of grammatical usage (to the more easygoing and hyperinformal writers out there, members of this group will be known as the pickers of nit).

In an online exhibition, labels for the objects will allow the curator to expand the amount of information available. Gallery and Thibadeau (2000), in “On Beyond Label Copy,” note that “access to the content of the archival documents . . . can be provided based on the user’s expressed level of interest similar to the selection made for a traditional on-the-walls exhibition or in a less-structured way similar to that of users browsing a library catalog.”

All the elements, good and bad, noted above and in the literature of exhibit labeling generally pertain to gallery exhibitions. Let’s now take a closer look at some of the concerns and special requirements of the script and labels for an online exhibition.

The Online Environment

How does an online exhibition differ from a gallery exhibition? Some of the differences are obvious. Visitors have less control over their environment in an online exhibition. Objects for the most part will appear only as two-dimensional images on a screen (leaving aside for the moment the possibility of three-dimensional imaging, which, though it simulates three dimensions, is still presenting objects on a flat screen).

Physical “exhibitions are conceived as sculpture. They are three-dimensional compositions which recognize the importance of solids and voids and strive for satisfactory spatial relationships” (Belcher 1991, 41). Online exhibitions, however, are not conceived in a true three-dimensional space. Thus we need to ask how an online exhibition should be conceived to maximize the possibilities of online design and minimize the disadvantages of the online environment.

Additionally, for the most part, the typical library or archival online exhibition (or for that matter, most online exhibitions from even the largest and best-funded museums) cannot hope to compete with the enhanced and inter-
active websites created by the likes of Disney, AOL/Time-Warner, or other large, multimedia megacorporations.

Still, this does not mean that an online exhibition needs to be a dull, static collection of images presented in a strict, linear fashion. On the contrary, "the design of interfaces should be considered an art form, similar to a performance, where shifts of attention are orchestrated throughout the text—which has the commanding role—and the other elements of the play" (Pierroux). In an online exhibition, as in a gallery exhibition, it is the presentation that brings to life the intellectual content of the script and unleashes the potential dynamism of the objects.

Jan Hjorth (1978), in How to Make a Rotten Exhibition, playfully lists a number of do's that make for a bad exhibition.

The true designer must realize that it is the exhibits that count. Labels and other peripheral material are a secondary consideration. Better a slapdash text than no text at all.

One practical hint: long texts are often easier to write than short ones, apart from which they are more comprehensive and, ipso facto, more scientific.

Always use scientifically accurate expressions, regardless of their intelligibility to the visitors.

Pictures should be made both small and plentiful.

Ignore all questions of copyright. Just take whatever you fancy in the way of pictures, photographs, drawings, and music.

In a more serious vein, Wendy Thomas and Danielle Boily (1998), in their "Virtual Exhibition Production: A Reference Guide," note a number of elements for a good online exhibition. These include

Providing an opportunity to visit museum exhibitions more than once
Allowing for surprise and wonder, and promoting dreaming and creation
Giving an overall impression of the site on the home page
Updating the site on a regular basis to attract visitors and keep them coming back
Using source material provided by the medium to enhance meaning
Displaying images that can be used on the Internet
Designing the project like a research tool
Providing access to normally inaccessible documents
Ensuring research projects have international dissemination
Hooking visitors by making browsing pleasant
Touching users' emotions

Additionally, Bernadette G. Callery and Robert Thibadeau (2000) have asked a number of questions about what the design of an online exhibition should provide the viewer. Among the questions that they pose that could be solved through the creation of online exhibitions are

Do museum visitors want to know more about exhibited objects?
How can this additional information be organized and presented for the visitor's use?
What type of background and contextual information would the visitors select, such as correspondence or photographs, if given a choice?

How can archival documents be organized for presentation as an adjunct to an online exhibition?

How does online use of these adjunct archival materials differ from their on-site use, particularly in frequency of selection?

Do online visitors spend more time searching for and viewing this associated archival material than do on-site visitors?

The online environment neither excuses nor encourages bad exhibitions. It is up to the curators and designers of an online exhibition to be aware of its nature and take advantage of its unique opportunities to enhance the exhibition idea.

**INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ISSUES**

"Ignore all questions of copyright. Just take whatever you fancy in the way of pictures, photographs, drawings, and music" is a bit of tongue-in-cheek advice quoted earlier from Jan Hjorth (1978). Needless to say, the willy-nilly appropriation of images, sounds, and video is unlikely to be condoned in many institutions (or by the institution's lawyers). More difficult to deal with is the use of intellectual property for which your library or archive has some claim.

As a general rule, it is best to clear all questions with the legal office of your institution. As with most moving targets, a written and closely adhered-to policy for use of materials, credits, and so forth will make your life easier.

If you will be using materials in your online exhibitions from other units of your institution or from unrelated institutions, be sure that you have a proper release form and credit clearance. The form you use may be similar to that used for print publication, with appropriate modifications.

In the rapidly changing arena of digital intellectual property law, it is important that you are as up-to-date as possible. For some examples of copyright and condition of use statements, see appendix C.

**SOURCES CITED**


Pierroux, Palmyre. “Art in Networks: Information and Communication Technology in Art Museums.” Available at: http://www.media.uio.no/internettendring/publikasjoner/tekst/Pierroux/02Contents.html.


**ONLINE EXHIBITIONS DISCUSSED**

*Daughter of Earth: Agnes Smedley and Smedley-Mackinnon Collections.*

*Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Arizona State University Libraries.*

http://www.asu.edu/lib/archives/smedley.htm

*From Smithson to Smithsonian.* Smithsonian Institution Libraries.

http://www.sil.si.edu/Exhibitions/Smithson-to-Smithsonian


http://www.sil.si.edu/Exhibitions/Curtis


http://www.glenbow.org/derouin/index.htm

*A Great Assemblage.* Yale University Library.

http://www.library.yale.edu/exhibition/judaica

*John Bull and Uncle Sam: Four Centuries of British-American Relations.* Library of Congress and British Library.

http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/british
"Make the Dirt Fly" Smithsonian Institution Libraries.
http://www.sil.si.edu/Exhibitions/Make-the-Dirt-Fly

http://www.hds.harvard.edu/library/exhibita/index.html

Nos Los Inquisidores. Department of Special Collections of the University Libraries of Notre Dame.
http://www.rarebooks.nd.edu/Exbl/Inquisition

Out of This World: Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy. National Library of Canada.
http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/events/sci-fi/esci-fi.htm

Oveta Culp Hobby, the Little Colonel. Woodson Research Center, Special Collections at Fondren Library, Rice University.
http://www.rice.edu/Fondren/Woodson/exhibits/wac

http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/archives/exhibits/newbooks99

Reflections in Time. Middle Tennessee State University.
http://janus.mtsu.edu/Reflections/index.html

http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/slv/exhibit/roman.html

http://www.mainehistory.org/rrr.html

Science and the Artist's Book. Smithsonian Institution Libraries.

Walt Whitman and the Development of "Leaves of Grass." University of South Carolina Libraries, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections.
http://www.sc.edu/library/spcoll/amlit/whitman.html

The Writings of Paul Laurence Dunbar. Springfield Library, Rare Book and Special Collections.
http://www.springfieldlibrary.org/dunbar/dunbar.html
Chapter 8

Design

No pains must be spared in the presentation of material in the exhibition halls. The specimens must be prepared in the most careful and artistic manner, and arranged attractively in well-designed cases and behind the clearest of glass. Each object must bear a label, giving its name and history so fully that all the probable questions of the visitor are answered in advance. Books of reference must be kept in convenient places. Colors of walls, cases, and labels must be restful and quiet, and comfortable seats should be everywhere accessible, for the task of the museum visitor is a weary one at best.—George Brown Goode

Though the visitors to your online exhibition will not need comfortable seats, nearly all of the points made by Goode in the above quotation are applicable to online as well as gallery exhibitions. Though you may have come up with a brilliant idea for your exhibition, though you may have written the most intelligent and entertaining script ever and assembled the best objects, if you are unable to translate all of those things into a design that works in an online environment, your visitors will be lost, or worse, will choose to go elsewhere.

In many instances, your library or archive will have been creating gallery exhibitions for a number of years. Much of the material from those exhibitions (as well as the curators themselves) may still be around. In such instances, it is a matter of adapting the material to the online environment and digitizing the appropriate images. Though the latter may be simple enough, adapting material is not always as simple as it may appear. The National Gallery of Canada acknowledges the problem of adapting material from the printed medium to the interactive (Pierroux): “It is difficult to use existing documentation for a real visitor and adapt it to a cyberspace environment. Ideally, content would be created specifically and solely for the Web visitor, but time and resources are not always available for this type of approach.”
A similar problem occurs when attempting to simultaneously create a gallery exhibition and an online exhibition. In many cases, the attempt to bring about online and gallery exhibitions at the same time will involve quite a bit of work and pulling of hair.

Before we jump into some principles and practices for designing online exhibitions, let's reiterate a few points that may seem obvious but bear repeating.

First, a computer monitor (or TV screen) is not an exhibition gallery. A monitor does not have physical and visual elements (such as Goode's comfortable seats) to immediately draw a visitor into an experience. The web experience is an interesting blend of the passive and the interactive. Simply by walking into an exhibition gallery, visitors are able to absorb (consciously or subconsciously) much of the content as well as the basic layout of at least the first room of the exhibition. Sitting or standing, a visitor can scan the room and on some level grasp its entire contents. Likewise, when visitors click into your online exhibition, they are thrust into a similar environment where they can absorb the information before them. Unlike the gallery visitor, however, the visitor to the online exhibition must move from passive absorption of the exhibition to active participation through clicking or scrolling. Though a gallery exhibition may lose visitors if they turn and walk out, the online exhibition can lose visitors through the simple click of a mouse.

Second, remember that your tools are limited. The designer of a gallery exhibition can be fairly certain that the vast majority of visitors will experience the physical elements of an exhibition (colors, fonts used in labels, case layout) in roughly the same manner. In the online environment, that assumption can't be made. Until everyone in the entire world has the same kind of computer, the same settings on that computer, the same bandwidth on their Internet connection, and the same web browser, the experiences of the visitors to your online exhibition will vary, sometimes even drastically. When designing an online exhibition, you will have to keep a number of possible experiences in mind.

And third, nobody likes to get lost. In a gallery exhibition, visitors will get lost only in the most labyrinthine layout and will always have security staff, docents, or other visitors to help them find their way through (or out of) the exhibition. In the online world, once visitors have lost the thread of navigation through your exhibition, the quickest and most satisfying remedy is a click that sends them out of your exhibition and into something easier to navigate.

So, with those thoughts in mind, let's explore web design for online exhibitions.

One of the key components of design in general, and of good design in particular, is the solution to a set of known (and unknown) problems. In an exhibition, the design will manifest itself not only in the solution of problems, such as those related to display and visibility, but also in the communication of an idea.

The design process itself is highly individualistic, and different designers will use different methods to achieve their goals. Still, a number of typical steps or processes can be enumerated. Bruce Archer (1965), in Systematic Method for
Designers, listed 229(!) events in a design process. For practical purposes, we can distill those down to the following:

Problem Analysis. What is the purpose of this exhibition and how will it be presented?

Synthesis. After analyzing the problem, put together all the pieces and see what you get.

Development. Start putting your ideas on the screen. Experiment with colors and designs, and don't forget to save your ideas as you go along. What seemed stupid and awful on a late Friday night might be the very thing you want when you look at it with a fresh eye Monday morning.

Revision. Revise again and again and again. There is a reason behind the saying Ars longa vita brevis (Art is long, life is short). Revision will allow you to hone a design to make it the best it can be.

Finalization. Remember you don't have forever. Deadlines and the human need to have a project come to a close will force you to pick one design over another. Come to a conclusion on a design and then implement it throughout the online exhibition.

Also remember that in the design process, the difference between a small job and a big job can be deceptive. In many cases, it is a small exhibition that is more difficult to design than a large exhibition. With fewer objects to choose from, less text, and so forth, each element of the exhibition is more on display and will receive more attention than it would in a sprawling exhibition of hundreds of objects. Though in all exhibitions (large and small), each object should be carefully thought of in the design process, in a small exhibition, the design process and its results will be more on display.

With online exhibitions, in addition to the usual problems of design, a number of limitations are imposed by the media on the designer. Making the most of the additional opportunities afforded the web designer and minimizing the limitations will make for the best online exhibition.

Let's examine some of the opportunities and limitations to be found in online exhibition design.

Screen Layout

Do you hate to scroll? Most people don't mind scrolling vertically. Vertical scrolling is a fairly acceptable mode of moving around information on a computer screen. Horizontal scrolling, however, is another story. Unless the information on the screen is laid out so that horizontal scrolling is the navigation method, nothing will be more irksome to visitors than having to scroll both horizontally and vertically to view your site.

So, why are your visitors having horizontal scrolling issues? Two words: monitor resolution. Screen resolution is one of the key environmental factors that determine how information appears on the screen. Most of us who know our way around the different settings on our computers know that all screens are not created equally and, more importantly, know that many screen settings can be adjusted. Many users, however, are unaware of monitor settings and how to adjust them, and live with whatever the factory defaults are.

Monitor resolution refers to the number of pixels that appear on the vertical and horizontal axes of the screen. For many years, screen size for most computers was fixed at 640 pixels wide by 480 pixels high. Resolution is a factor
of hardware (monitor, CPU, and video/graphics card) and can be adjusted within the bounds of the hardware. Many high-end computers still ship, however, with monitor resolution set at the lowest common denominator of $640 \times 480$ pixels even though the monitor and video/graphics card itself may be capable of resolutions in the $1,280 \times 1,024$ category or higher.

When designing online exhibitions, it's important to think about screen resolution or your visitors will end up with unpleasant horizontal scrolling. Another element of screen resolution to keep in mind is the size of your images. An image that is 400 pixels wide will take up approximately two-thirds of a screen set to $640 \times 480$ resolution. That same 400-pixel-wide image on a $1,280 \times 1,024$ screen will take up only about a third of the screen. On the lower-resolution screen, the image will appear large, and on the higher-resolution screen, small. If your design depends on a banner logo or title image to take up the entire width of the screen, remember that if the image is, say, 700 pixels wide, it will appear perfect on an $800 \times 600$ resolution monitor; slightly smaller on a $1,280 \times 1,024$ monitor; and force the viewer to scroll on a $640 \times 480$ monitor.

Another culprit in screen design that can raise havoc with different monitor resolutions is tables. Many web designers use the <table width="x"> element to provide left and right margins or white space on their screens. If, however, the width of the table is cited in pixels (e.g., <table width="775">), a web browser on a lower-resolution screen will extend this table beyond the width of the viewing area and force the user to scroll horizontally. Citing the table width in percentages (e.g., <table width="90%">) will give you better results on a variety of monitor resolutions, but may not solve all scrolling problems. A better solution for providing a tablilike layout is to use style sheets (see chapter 6).

Tiling graphics (e.g., graphics used as backgrounds to a page or to parts of a table) will often appear in strange configurations on monitor resolutions for which they were not designed.

Lastly, web browsers themselves take up a certain percentage of the screen. Though this is most obvious on the top portion of the screen (where the toolbars and so forth reside), there is also a small, yet significant portion of the screen on each side taken up by the web browser border and scroll bar. See figures 14, 15, and 16 for examples of the same exhibition page seen in different web browsers.

For assistance in screen resolution design issues, visit the Browsergrid from the Web Page Design for Designers page (Gillespie 2000).

A very similar problem to that of screen resolution is color display on monitors. How many colors are there in the world? How many colors can a monitor display? How many colors can your web browser display safely without distortion? Is the color that I see on my PC screen the same color that you see on your Mac screen?

Unfortunately, all the questions posed above have no satisfactory answers (except for the first one, whose answer is infinite, which in most cases is not really a satisfactory answer).

As with monitor resolution, color display is dependent on the video/graphics card, the monitor, and the CPU. On a typical PC, you will find a number of

options for the display of color. In the past, most color monitors could display only 256 (8-bit) colors (this is, for you old-timers out there, after the age of the amber-on-black monitors). Most monitors now have color options ranging from the low end 256 colors to 65,536 (16-bit) colors, 16,777,216 (24-bit) colors, and "true color." Similar to the case of monitor resolution, some computers will ship with the low end of color display and their users will never take advantage of all their color possibilities. The problems of printing in accurate color from the typical desktop computer to the typical desktop laser or inkjet printer are even more complex.

What do these color facts mean to you, the online exhibition designer? First and foremost, it means that the colors you are seeing on your screen (in your office with your ambient light) will not be the same colors seen by anyone else in the world. This is not to say that they won't be close in many cases, but it is important to remember that color, one of the most important design elements, is much more fluid in online design than in gallery exhibitions.

A LITTLE BIT OF COLOR THEORY

In the real world, color is subtractive. As objects absorb light, they reflect back the color with some of the color subtracted. Starting with the primary colors (red, blue, and yellow) and mixing them in varying amounts results in a spectrum of colors.
A computer screen, however, can’t absorb light, but rather generates light. Computers (and TVs, for that matter) use what is called additive synthesis to display color. In additive synthesis, the colors red, green, and blue (popularly referred to as RGB) are mixed together to form a spectrum of colors.

For those of you with an experimental nature, take some red paint and some green paint and mix them together. What color do you get? This is an example of subtractive color theory in action. Now, mix red and green using a computer graphics program. What color do you get? This is additive synthesis in action. (For the less-than-curious or those without access to poster paints and graphics programs, mixing red paint and green paint makes brown, and mixing red pixels and green pixels makes yellow.)

COLOR ELEMENTS

Color is very complex, and years of design training and a natural talent are needed to master all its elements. A few things to keep in mind (which you may remember from the color unit in elementary school) are the three types of color: primary (red, blue, and yellow), secondary (mixtures of equal portions of primary colors—red + yellow = orange, blue + yellow = green, red + blue = purple), and tertiary (gradations of color that are created when unequal portions for primary colors are mixed). Note: these examples are from the subtractive world of real color, not from the additive world of computer color.

On a color wheel, colors that are next to each other (e.g., blue and purple) are said to be similar; those that are opposite each other (e.g., orange and blue) are termed complementary; and those separated by three colors (e.g., red and green) are contrasting.

By adding white to any primary or secondary color, you create a different tint; by adding black, you create a different shade.

Three additional factors, hue, value, and saturation, determine, respectively, the color differentiation, darkness, and intensity.

By mixing all these elements of color, a designer can evoke a range of feelings and emotions. Bright red and bright yellow can remind us of hotdog stands. Cool blues and greens, of woody forests. Colors can also evoke different meanings for members of different cultures. For a quick discussion of how color can mean different things in different cultures, see Molly E. Holzschlag’s “Color My World” in “Other Websites Discussed.” Additional information on the meaning of color can be found at the website Color Matters.

One last element to be concerned with is the gamma value of monitors. Gamma valuations of color and monitors is a complex topic that is in many cases subjective. For our purposes, gamma can be thought of as the relative brightness of the image on the screen. Or, it might be easiest to repeat the mantra “Macintoshes have better gamma correction than PCs do.” For an in-depth discussion of issues relating to gamma, see “Why Do Images Appear Darker on Some Displays? An Explanation of Monitor Gamma,” by Robert W. Berger.

NAMING COLORS

If you’ve ever ordered anything from a mail-order catalog, you’ve probably scratched your head at some of the color options. I want a red sweater, but the only choices that sound close are burnt clay and frosted burgundy. Which one is
red? Computers are less tolerant of ambiguity than even the most fastidious of us humans. For a computer, a color has to have a very specific meaning and value.

As noted above, computers view colors in an additive synthesis of red, green, and blue (RGB). Thus, for computers, all color values can be expressed in terms of 256 potential values for red and green and blue. Black expressed in RGB values is 000, 000, 000. White is expressed as 255, 255, 255 of the three colors. Red is expressed as 255, 000, 000. By varying the proportions of each of the three colors, a wide variety of colors can be created. To make life more complex for web designers in the early days of HTML, color for such elements as backgrounds and fonts had to be displayed in hexadecimal format rather than in RGB values.

Hexadecimal is a base-16 number system that consists of sixteen unique symbols: the numbers 0 to 9 and the letters A to F. In hexadecimal notation, black (000, 000, 000 in RGB) is 00, 00, 00; white is FF, FF, FF; and red is FF, 00, 00.

In an attempt to make color notation easier for web designers, the powers that be (Microsoft, the W3C, and Netscape) formulated standard names that web browsers would render. Thus, aqua was defined as 000, 000, 255 (00, FF hexadecimall) and teal as 000, 000, 128 (00, 80, 80 hexadecimal). Color names were later expanded to a list of 136. See the Netscape Color Names site for the complete list. On that list, we find lavenderblush (255, 240, 245 in RGB, and FF, F0, F5 hexadecimal). Needless to say, as a web designer, your life will be simpler if you focus on the unambiguous numeric color values.

**BROWSER-SAFE COLOR PALETTE**

When we were kids, our world of colors was determined by the size of our crayon box. Some kids got just the basic 8-pack of colors, some got the box of 16, some got the big box of 64, and the really lucky kids got the box of 128 crayons with a built-in sharpener.

Now we've grown up to design online exhibitions, and we have not 8, 16, 64, or even 128 colors to play with, but millions! The world's our oyster and we can thumb our noses at the limitations imposed by Crayola!

Alas, as noted above, the different monitors, operating platforms, and browsers impose on our creative potential as much as any crayon maker. So what are we to do? We'll just take a chance. Throw caution to the wind and design our exhibition with a mistyrose (FF, E4, E1 hexadecimal) background and darkseagreen (8F, BC, 8F) text and let the pixels fall where they may.

Well, that might be one option, but another would be to use the browser-safe color palette and save ourselves some trouble in the world of color.

The browser-safe color palette was devised by Lynda Weinman to include the colors that would safely (e.g., correctly) display on a variety of computers with different web browsers. The browser-safe color palette is composed of 216 colors. Those colors represent the 256 colors available on an 8-bit computer system. Forty colors are reserved for the operating system and the browser, leaving 216 colors that will render true on any system.

The browser-safe color palette is useful when creating images with large swaths of a single color (for instance, in logos), when specifying background colors or font colors, and in other instances when you can control the color of an object. If you use a color that is not among the 216 in the browser-safe color
palette, when that color is rendered on the screen, the computer will dither it (that is, choose the next closest color according to its own set of parameters). Depending on the system, browser, and so forth, the color may dither to something you would neither expect nor want. In an image (say, a photograph), the dithering will not be noticeable because you are unlikely to have large numbers of similar color pixels next to each other. If, however, you use a large swatch of a nonsafe color as a background, the dithering will be obvious.

Screen size, color, . . . what else is going to cause the online exhibition designer problems?

Yes, fonts. Fonts, or the look of the actual letters used for your text, are a major problem with web design. Before we get into the problems that you will have with fonts as you design your online exhibition, let’s clarify a few terms.

**FONT VERSUS TYPEFACE**

In common parlance, *font* and *typeface* (or type) are often used interchangeably. To professional designers, however, there is a very specific meaning attached to each of these terms. A font is design for a set of characters. A typeface includes both the font design and a number of other qualities that pertain to it (such as size, pitch, spacing, and weighting). Thus Times Roman is a description for a certain kind of character’s shape. The Times Roman typeface will include a number of sizes (5 point, 10 point, 12 point, and so on); different styles, such as italic; different weights, such as bold; and other characteristics.

Another term, *typography*, refers to the technical production, or process, of printing from type, or to the general appearance, arrangement, or style of words or characters on a page. In the world of the Web, any preconceived notions about typography need to be thrown out. Still, it is necessary to consider some of the principles of typography (e.g., proper use of headings to reflect relations among topics, use of white space around text, and use of boldface and italics). Web pages differ from printed pages in a number of ways. Some of these differences are outlined in “Typography on the Web,” by Frank Boumphrey. For example:

- The shape of the page is different; it is usually a landscape (i.e., horizontal) configuration rather than a portrait (i.e., vertical) configuration.
- The resolution of the medium is lower. Finely detailed fonts do not therefore render well.
- Because of the above, reading speed is about 30 percent slower than for the printed page.
- Readers tend to scan rather than read.
- The retention rate is about 50 percent lower than for the printed page.
- Scroll bars add a new factor.

**FONTS ON THE WEB**

If you look at the default settings of your web browser, you will generally find two kinds of fonts listed, fixed-pitch fonts and proportional fonts. Generally,
the default fixed-pitch font will be Courier and the default proportional font Times Roman. One of the first things to remember about fonts in web design is that unless you specify a font in your page markup, the default font on the viewer's web browser will be used.

But what if you want to use a font that is not Times Roman? Your computer has a really nifty font (say, Matisse or Bees Knees) that you've set as your default because you like to view the world that way. How can you code your exhibition so that everybody sees your pages through your worldview? The simple answer is that you can't.

Current web technology demands that only fonts available on an individual's machine are available for display (we'll get into downloadable or dynamic fonts in a bit). That means that unless the entire world (or at least the portion of it that is viewing your web pages) has the font you specify in your design on their machine, the text will render not as your selected font, but as the user's default font.

The other great font-related variable in web design is font size. In the print world, the size of a character is measured in points, with each point being around \(1/72\) of an inch. Needless to say, this measurement is not quite adequate on a computer screen for a number of reasons. The first issue that faces us is screen resolution (see above). But even if we get around that, just as users have the ability to set a default font, they can also select a size to display their text. In Internet Explorer, there are five options ranging from "smallest" to "largest"; Netscape (version 4.x) allows users to set the default size in points and enables them to increase or decrease the text size by using the control plus square brackets key combination.

Given the limitations affecting font selection and font size, what can you do when selecting the best fonts for use in your online exhibitions?

**USING FONTS**

The first and best recommendation that can be made regarding the whole font issue in web design is to use style sheets. Let me repeat that. *Use style sheets* to handle your font styles and sizes. Though it is true that older browsers will not be able to handle style sheets, a good design can be created that will degrade well enough to be viewable in a user's default font. See chapter 6 for more details on using style sheets.

OK, you've agreed to use style sheets for handling your text display. What other issues should you keep in mind?

First off, there are three major categories of fonts: serif, sans serif, and display (sometimes known as decorative). Serif fonts are those that have little finishing strokes or fillips going off the ending lines of a letter. Times Roman, Basset, and Charter are examples of fonts with serifs. Sans serif fonts, which first appeared around 1815 to 1817, lack serifs. The character forms are simpler and often have an underlying geometric design. Examples of sans serif fonts include Arial, Futura, and Helvetica.

Spencer and Reynolds (1977, 100) note that "many readers claim that they find sans serif faces subjectively less legible than sericed faces, but objective measures of reading performance are often conflicting and it cannot be said that one type style is significantly more or less legible than the other."
As a general rule, sans serif fonts are good choices for titles and other major headings, and serifed fonts for large blocks of text. However, for accessibility purposes, sans serif fonts are generally recommended.

Display or decorative fonts are a little harder to describe. You might say that they are the fonts that annoy you when someone uses them for extensive blocks of text. Such fonts are most suitable for titles and other headings. Examples of display fonts are Lisbon, Tempo, and BlippoBlack. Remember that display fonts are less likely to be on all your viewers’ computers, so they should be avoided for most web work. Also, try not to mix too many kinds of fonts on a page (or even a website). Remember, you do not want your page to look like a ransom note!

**Boldface** and **italics** should be used sparingly and appropriately. Use boldface when you want to call attention to a word or phrase. Italics should be used sparingly in web design because they are often difficult to read on-screen. As most of the items in your online exhibitions will be books (or other items in which titles or other elements are commonly italicized), you may wish to use another typographic element to denote titles if italics will cause problems with your screen display. Please do not use underlining on a web page except as a final resort. Users are accustomed to hypertext links being underlined, and many will be annoyed if underlined text is not a hyperlink.

Lastly, remember that in the online world, color is cheap, so you can be more creative and liberal in the use of color for your text. At the same time, keep in mind that large swathes of bright yellow text will be illegible for most viewers.

**FONTS AND STYLE SHEETS**

Many of the basic principles in the style sheet technical specification are related directly to control of fonts. With style sheets, you can control the font type, size, color, and weight; line spacing; character spacing; indents; margins; and so forth. Advanced use of style sheets can also allow you to layer text to achieve a drop shadow effect or other design effects that were previously available only with text images. Explore style sheets to see how much you can accomplish before resorting to the text image method.

**DOWNLOADABLE, EMBEDDED, OR DYNAMIC FONTS (AS PROMISED EARLIER)**

The ability to embed a font in a page design practically eliminates the necessity of using text images. A number of standards and proprietary plans are in the works to allow web designers to use fonts so that their viewers will see exactly what was designed, but, as of this writing, we are not there yet.

In chapter 4, we discussed labels and their content. The design of labels and how they will appear on the screen can be almost as important as the content. Remember, if people are not lured into reading the text by its appearance, they may not read it at all. Daniel Jacoby and Marie Sylvie Poli (1995, 51), in their article “Scriptvisual Documents in Exhibitions: Some Theoretical Guidelines,” note that “the text, while meant to be read, is also characterized by its spatiovisual organization in the space that it occupies. Thus, an exhibition text
is also made to be seen. Texts displayed in museums differ from the texts or printed material we usually read. Reading/seeing, seeing/reading; in a museum, these two cognitive activities are permanently intertwined."

In the online environment that statement is even more true! When thinking of your labels (as well as the other text in your online exhibition), remember that the text and how it appears are as important as the images you select. Label text should be designed to complement the content of the label. Through the use of fonts, colors, sizes, and emphasis (boldface and italics), the relative importance of the various elements of the label will be communicated to the viewer/reader.

Studies and common sense show that, in the online environment, people will not read large blocks of text (a truism sadly evident in gallery exhibitions also). When designing your text and labels, use plenty of white space (or other colored space as appropriate), images (either objects from the exhibition itself or elements that are drawn from objects in the exhibition), or other design devices (e.g., horizontal rules) to break up your text. Labels are often more effective if they are set off in a distinctive visual manner (different fonts, font color, font size) from the narrative exhibition text.

**USING TEXT IMAGES**

With the limitations on font types noted above, web designers are often tempted to use text images for their exhibitions. Text images, or bit-mapped text, are images created in an image program (e.g., Photoshop) that are simply pictures of letters and words. The benefit of text images is that they enable you as a designer to use all the fonts that are currently on your computer (or that you may purchase for the project). The downside of text images is that profligate use of them will dramatically slow down the loading of your page. Text images are of a fixed size (that of the image), and thus on monitors with varying resolutions the text will appear in varying sizes.

Though web usability guides generally frown on the use of text images for typical websites, for online exhibitions they are almost a necessity for achieving the best design.

This does not give designers carte blanche to create entire exhibitions with all the text in the form of bit-mapped images. As a general rule, use text images only for major headings within the exhibition, and always provide an "alt" attribute with the text of the image tag.

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not want to be scrolling through single, long pages of text. Fortunately, in the hypertext world of online exhibitions, such problems can be dealt with through use of effective design.

First, plan your design around principles that will allow you to break the narrative text and objects into discrete sections or components. This will allow you to create relatively small pages. Use a good sampling of effectively sized images and well-designed text blocks to create pages that work as a individual units. The object images may or may not have labels associated with them at this point (depending on the space available). If there is no space for a full label, you can provide a brief or truncated label that is sufficient to identify the object. Now here is where the hypertext capability of online exhibitions comes in handy. By using hyperlinks, you can show visitors a much larger image of the object and provide more extensive label text. You may want to provide even more information about the object. For books and manuscripts, you could provide text transcriptions, additional page or leaf openings, or alternative images of the object.

Next, you will want to design the online exhibition so that visitors can navigate through with some sort of structure. For gallery exhibitions, it has been noted that “once in the exhibition, visitors spend a disproportionate amount of their visit time near the entrance, and progressively less and less time on exhibits as they move towards the exit” (Belcher 1991, 112). Just as in gallery exhibitions, where visitors spend most of their time at the beginning, this exit gradient effect is exacerbated in an online exhibition for the reasons noted previously. Unlike in a physical exhibition, where the lure of a gift shop, a cafeteria, or even a rest room may at least draw visitors from point A to point B, in an online exhibition, there is always something else just a click away that can steal visitors from your exhibition.

For gallery exhibitions, a number of circulation patterns for visitors have been defined. These patterns are arterial, comb, chain, star/fan, and block (Belcher 1991, 114). In an arterial exhibition, the viewer is drawn through the exhibition in a fairly linear fashion from the beginning to the end. In a comb design, the central exhibition core is broken by side galleries. A chain design allows the visitor to circulate through a set pattern. A star/fan pattern has exhibits that fan out from a central core. And a block design basically allows the visitor to move through an unpatterned series of exhibits.

For an online exhibition, these design structures can be emulated. The easiest design to emulate is the arterial. In this type of design, the viewer will simply click through (forward and back) the items or pages in the exhibition. Given the advantages of hypertext, however, other patterns are often more popular for online exhibitions. An examination of a number of online exhibitions suggests that one popular navigation option roughly resembles the star/fan. In this type of online exhibition, once viewers enter, they are given a number of choices about how to proceed through the contents of the exhibition. After each choice, all the previous choices remain available in the form of menus or links on each page.

Granted the ability to offer viewers many paths through an online exhibition, a designer can sometimes become overwhelmed with possibilities and give viewers too many choices. Remember to keep in mind the narrative of the exhibition and how the overall theme fits into the design of the exhibition.

And thus, this becomes a good time to note...
Beware the Hyperlink!

The availability of hyperlinks has led to the proliferation of documents that hyperlink, cross-link, and back-link just because they can. Giving your visitors lots of choices within and outside of your exhibition is good but can too often lead to confusion. In the case of an online exhibition, remember to tell a story and build an experience. A proliferation of links to resources outside the exhibition (even to your own resources) will distract from the story that you are trying to tell. Unless it is highly relevant and important for your viewer to leave your site to go to another site, it is best to save your hyperlinks for the well-thought-out and perfectly organized webliography or reading list that will accompany your site.

CONTRACTING ONLINE EXHIBITION DESIGN WORK

In some instances, limitations of time, staff talents, and money will dictate that the best course of action is to contract out the complete design and production of an online exhibition. Intellectual control and, in most cases, the writing of the script will stay in-house.

A number of points need to be taken into consideration when contracting out web design. Technical specifications and site maintenance are the most important.

The specifications should include the version of HTML (or XHTML) preferred. Clearly state what level(s) of accessibility the site should maintain. Details for the size of images, color, and navigation schemes also need to be spelled out. You may also wish to have any logos or other navigational or graphical icons delivered in their native format (e.g., Photoshop PSD files or Adobe Illustrator files) in the event that you need to modify them later. Be careful that the web designer does not use technologies that you will not be able to run on your own site. If the designer uses streaming audio or video, you must have the capability of serving those products on your web server.

Things change! When you have contracted out web design work and you want to make a change of some sort, you must be able to perform site maintenance on the online exhibition. Make certain that any site peculiarities (such as directory structure and file-naming conventions) are well understood (and documented) so that when the inevitable time comes that someone on your staff will need to make a change, it will be a painless process.

See appendix E for a suggested timeline for contracted exhibition design.

METADATA FOR ONLINE EXHIBITIONS

Once you have designed and mounted your online exhibition, you will want to make sure that others can find it. If your library or archive has a web-accessible online catalog, be certain that you catalog your exhibitions and make them available through your catalog. Additionally, you will want to embed metadata in the opening pages of the exhibition to assist Internet search engines in finding and properly indexing them.

A popular scheme for metadata is the Dublin Core (NISO Standard Z39.85). Dublin Core provides an extensible set of fifteen descriptive elements that create access points to items. See appendix F for an example of Dublin Core from an online exhibition.

As many of the more popular Internet search engines do not index Dublin Core metadata, it is also good to add the standard descriptive metatags to the head of your document:
• If you are retrofitting a gallery exhibition, keep in mind that online and
gallery exhibitions have different needs in design.
• Look at your design with a number of different screen resolutions.
• Try different color settings to see what happens to your design.
• Use many different browsers (and release versions of browsers) to look at
your design.
• Don’t forget to look at the design with a Mac (if designing with a PC).
• Don’t forget to look at the design with a PC (if designing with a Mac).
• Change the default font and screen colors on your browser and see what
happens to your design.
• Carefully select your fonts for headings and text to ensure that they will be
legible.
• Use text images sparingly and for maximum effect.
• Considering that users may wish to print portions of your exhibition (e.g.,
bibliographies), design appropriate or alternative pages suitable for
printing.
• Choose an appropriate navigation scheme for the narrative of your exhibi-
tion.
• User hyperlinks judiciously.
• Provide metadata access points to your exhibition.

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CGS5 Gamma page.
http://www.cgsd.com/papers/gamma.html

Color Matters.
http://www.colormatters.com


Dublin Core Home Page.
http://www.dublincore.org


Netscape Color Names.

"Typography on the Web." By Frank Boumphrey.
http://www.hypermedic.com/style/typog/typindex.htm

http://www.wpdfd.com/browsergrid.htm

http://www.vtiscan.com/~rwb/gamma.html
Sample Exhibition Script

The text below is excerpted from the exhibition script for Frontier Photographer: Edward S. Curtis, by William Baxter of Smithsonian Institution Libraries. It is reproduced with permission.

*****

Title
Frontier Photographer: Edward S. Curtis
A Smithsonian Institution Libraries Exhibition
#

Superquote
"Take a good look. We're not going to see this kind of thing much longer. It already belongs to the past."
—George Bird Grinnell to Edward S. Curtis, referring to the Sun Dance gathering of Blackfeet, Algonquin, and Bloods in 1900
#

Canyon de Chelly image
This image of the Canyon de Chelly in Arizona is perhaps the best known of Edward S. Curtis’ photogravure prints.

Canyon de Chelly, by Edward S. Curtis, 1904. Lent by Secretary and Mrs. I. Michael Heyman.
#

Introductory text
The Legacy of Edward S. Curtis
"I regard the work you do as one of the most valuable works which any American could now do."
—President Theodore Roosevelt in a letter to Edward S. Curtis, Dec. 16, 1905


Part photographic essay, part ethnographic survey, and part work of art, Curtis’ North American Indian Project represented an attempt to capture images of American Indians as they lived before contact with Anglo cultures. The photogravure prints in The North American Indian reveal peoples whose traditional ways of life were coming to an end as the U.S. frontier began to fade.

Thirty years of grueling work on the North American Indian Project cost the artist his marriage and his health. It also yielded an American legacy that is an artistic masterpiece.
#

Opening image
#
Curtis and Guptil advertisement

“One of the greatest examples of business energy and perseverance to be found in Seattle today.”
—Argus magazine, Dec. 14, 1896

Advertisement extolling Curtis and Guptil Studio, one of Curtis’ earliest photographic ventures.

SECTION 1 (Introducing Curtis, His Family)

Superquote

“If you hear anyone say I am not to succeed tell them they don’t know me.”
—Edward S. Curtis in a letter to his friend Edmond Meany, about 1908

#

Subhead:
Home Life

“He became determined to escape from his father's world, from a life of grinding physical labor and failure. He was going to . . . make something of himself.”
—An unnamed relative describing Edward S. Curtis, date unknown

“We always said he had no home life at all.”
—Florence Curtis Graybill

Visual and label:
Edward S. Curtis
Clara Curtis with Beth, Harold, and Florence

“Bright, well-read, a good conversationalist. [Clara, Edward's wife] shared Edward's love for this great, scenic land of the Northwest—but not his interest in photography.”
—An unnamed relative, about 1900

Born in 1868 in Whitewater, Wisconsin, Edward S. Curtis grew up in poverty. His father was in ill health and never fully able to support the family. After his father died, Edward took a series of odd jobs, ultimately settling on photography as a career. He taught himself from books and even made his own camera.

When Edward Curtis married Clara Phillips in 1892, she joined him in his increasingly successful Seattle studio. They had four children.

Ultimately, as Curtis worked on *The North American Indian*, his long absences and infrequent financial support led to a bitter divorce. Curtis’ children nonetheless remained loyal and active supporters until his death in 1952.

Edward S. Curtis, by unknown artist, about 1890.
Courtesy James Graybill, Edward S. Curtis’ grandson.

Courtesy James Graybill, Edward S. Curtis’ grandson.

Superquote

“I have made about every sacrifice a human being can for the sake of the work, and the work is worth it . . . The lack of comparatively paltry dollars is maddening.”
—Edward S. Curtis in a letter to J. P. Morgan’s office, 1913

#