

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD EXHIBIT

Walter Jones (1987). Exhibit Planning, Development, and Implementation Procedures. Technical Report No. 87-90, Jacksonville, AL: Psychology Institute, Jacksonville State Univ.

Jones provided Visitor Behavior with a copy of procedures developed when he was the Director of the Somerset County Park Commission's Environmental Education Center in New Jersey. These procedures included a ten page document that described a general philosophy of exhibition, the characteristics of a good exhibit, steps in design and development, and exhibit planning procedure. Only the characteristics of a "good exhibit" described by Jones will be listed here.

A good exhibit will:

1. Be safe and secure..
  - a. by protecting the visitor.
  - b. by protecting the staff.
  - c. by protecting the objects of the exhibit itself.
  - d. by protecting the building itself.
2. Be visible...
  - a. by adequate, carefully placed lighting.
  - b. by having no obstructions to the view for all visitors -- adults and children.
  - c. by being shown with minimum inconvenience and distraction.
3. Look good...
  - a. by being well made, not crudely or hastily put together.
  - b. by being clean and well maintained, to retain as much "newness" as possible (when worn or too badly damaged the exhibit should be removed).
4. Be worthwhile...
  - a. by giving the visitor something of value in exchange for his time and attention.
5. Attract attention...
  - a. by being colorful (eye-catching and eye-pleasing).
  - b. by being cleverly designed and well-built or done (quality workmanship is essential).
  - c. through visual impact (something hard to define - it has to be felt).
6. Hold attention...
  - a. by inviting physical participation (ideal for children, excellent for adults, but not always necessary or advisable).
  - b. because the content appeals (it is exciting, appropriate for the situation, presented in a unique fashion).
  - c. because it is uncluttered (the fewer items or details needed to give the message, the better. One fascinating specimen or picture is better than one dozen, if the one can tell the story).

7. Tell a simple, but important, story in a simple manner...

- a. by being brief (the fewer words, the better. And the less time it takes to absorb the story, the better).
- b. by teaching in a subtle, entertaining way, avoiding technical terms and too-advanced vocabulary (above all they must not obviously be teaching, and they must not preach).
- c. by unwritten interpretation incorporated into the visual center of the display. If this is not possible, the written interpretation should be made a part of the visual center. (And if this is not at all possible, the display should compel the viewer to read a brief card next to the display).

8. Arouse curiosity and imagination...

- a. by not giving all the related facts or details
- b. by asking questions (not necessarily in writing) which will lead interested viewers to learn more on their own, either by asking the staff, or by picking up a leaflet to read at their leisure, or by going to a book.
- c. by indicating there is more to be learned about the subject.

## BASIC EXHIBIT CATEGORIES

Harris Shettel (1968). An Evaluation of Existing Criteria for Judging the Quality of Science Exhibits. Curator, 11:2, 137-153.

After reviewing the literature, Shettel developed the following categories for judging exhibits. Read the article to see how Shettel used this list to construct an evaluation instrument.

1. Attractiveness
2. Ease of Comprehension
3. Unity Within the Exhibit
4. Ability to Attract Attention
5. Ability to Hold Visitor Attention
6. Appropriateness of Exhibit Presentation
7. Accuracy of Information Presented
8. Location and Crowd Flow
9. Visitor Characteristics
10. Focus of Attention
11. Textual Material (Labels, Headings, etc.)
12. Relation of Exhibits to Surrounding Area and other Exhibits.
13. Design of Exhibits (Size, Physical Layout, Use of Color, Use of Light, Use of Contrast)
14. Exhibit items (Quantity, Attractiveness, Size)
15. Communication Techniques (Sound, Motion, Demonstrations, Charts, Films, Models, Auxiliary Teaching Techniques, Audience Participation)