

What Makes a Good Exhibit?

Display Techniques

Simplicity, organization, and neatness help make any exhibit enjoyable and educational. Visit history museums and observe how exhibits are designed. Read about exhibit design at the library. The following guidelines will get you started.

❖ *Space* ❖

If you have an exhibit area, take special note of such features as location (is it easy for people to find?), security, lighting (both natural and artificial), number of cases, and any wall space where things can be mounted. If you do not have a space, can you get one? If no floor space is available, can you use part of a wall in the foyer or fellowship hall? If you have no cases, are there tables, bookcases, or desks you can use? You need enough space to comfortably accommodate visitors, enough light to illuminate without harming fragile materials, and enough security to protect your exhibit from damage or theft.

❖ *Artifacts* ❖

You can display many things, from books, letters, and newspapers to photographs, clothing, sheet music, bulletins, and ticket stubs. Use items from the church archives; also ask if you can borrow items from the congregation, the town library, church organizations, and the local historical society. Make your exhibit visually interesting as well as informative. Add some eye-catching photos, a colorful piece of fabric, or a period advertisement to the display.

❖ *Design* ❖

As you set up the display, remember that the eye naturally travels from left to right. Don't clutter the cases; balance creativity with practicality. Don't use tape, paper clips, or other visible fasteners on labels or artifacts. Props (such as stands or easels) add depth to the exhibit. They also protect delicate items like the bindings of opened books. You can make props out of cardboard and cover them with fabric, or purchase them from library supply catalogs. When displaying documents, include transcriptions if the original is difficult to read or if you want to highlight a specific passage. Photocopies can also enlarge important sections of a document. Photocopies of a specific document (like the list of charter members) can be souvenirs.

❖ *Labels* ❖

Labels are your stand-in, telling the visitor about the items on display. Use short, declarative sentences; avoid the passive voice or complicated language. A label that asks a question engages the reader; quotations capture people's attention. Make your language specific and personal. Remember that the labels and the artifacts should work together to illuminate your theme. It is vital that labels be neatly typed in lettering large enough to be read easily. Simple black lettering on a white background is generally best.