

## CATEGORICAL ADVICE for NHD PROJECTS

# EXHIBITS

Exhibits should MAKE a PROMISE and then KEEP the PROMISE

Make a Promise: The project should be eye-catching. It should be interesting from afar and draw viewers to it.

Keep the Promise: The project needs to follow through upon closer examination. The viewer's fascination should be rewarded when he looks closely.

- **KEY CHALLENGES:**
  - Visual medium—conveying ideas with visuals rather than words. SHOW don't Tell
  - All at once presentation—the entire exhibit comes at the viewer all at once. You need to help the viewer experience the exhibit as you intend
  
- **Structural Design:**
  - Space available: 60"High x 40"Deep x 30"Wide
  - Overall design should be meaningful.
    - Ex. Topic on Civil Rights era sit-ins display made to look like a lunch counter
  - Exhibits are free standing. Structure needs to be sturdily and solidly built
  - Structure needs to be transportable
    - Use lightweight but sturdy building materials
    - Make it so that it can be broken down for safe storage and transportation
  
- **Title & Thesis:** Title should be top center and obvious
  - Explicit thesis statement?
    - Others say “no”—exhibit is a visual medium and thesis should be evident without the need for explicit statement and it wastes words
    - Some say “yes”—necessary for clarity
      - Needs to be obviously the thesis
      - Cannot use too many words
  
- **Segmentation:** Clearly divide your space into smaller self-contained spaces (like paragraphs in an essay)
  - Use subtitles, color coding, lines
  - 1<sup>st</sup> segment = historical context (both long term on general topic and short term on time period)
  - Last segment = historical significance (how we continue to feel the influence of the event/topic)
  
- Must have **timeline** that provides unifies whole story
  - Must be well integrated into the exhibit and not simply tacked on.
  
- Use **visual cues** to organize & make connections
  - Use string or symbols to connect events on timeline to where they are developed in greater depth
  - Use arrows to show causation
  - Color code or use symbols to help connect related ideas together

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- **Visuals:**
  - Use a variety of types of visuals (photographs, cartoons, maps, charts, graphs, etc. but no clip art or generic images (ex. \$ or random pile of cash for money))
  - Vary size and orientation of visuals
  - Support with captions (visuals = evidence; captions = commentary)
- **Minimize Text**
  - Long blocks or even full sentences are deadly. Nobody reads them.
  - Use text for headings, subheadings, captions etc. but keep them short
  - Do not write in complete sentences
  - Even quotes, which don't count towards word total, should be kept short
    - always provide a caption that indicates who said it, in what context and how it is related
    - Use ellipsis's (...) and brackets([],) to edit quotes, judiciously
- Must be **visually appealing**
  - Use only high quality, hi-res visuals
  - Think about your background
  - Back images with matting
    - Layer foam core to create more 3D effect
    - Bevel cut foam core for clean look
  - Consider using an enclosed structure to draw viewer into exhibit
  - Use Lights to brighten
- Use **Video or Audio media** judiciously and only if there is a good reason for it
  - Razzle-dazzle media will backfire if it isn't well integrated

### Other Helpful Sources:

Cohen, Diana F., Words to Live By, Museum News, May/June 1990.

"Help! for National History Day Exhibit Projects". Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum.  
<http://hoover.archives.gov/education/nhd/index.html>

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