Getting Started in Exhibiting

Why exhibit? Many people exhibit because it is fun to do so. (Some of them have a competitive nature.) Exhibiting gives one a sense of pride, accomplishment and satisfaction. It allows one to be creative. It builds communication skills and helps build your collection. It enables one to give something back to our hobby. Above all, it provides many opportunities for socialization with other exhibitors, the judges and the viewing public

However, putting an exhibit together does take time and effort. You might have a fear of disapproval or of criticism about your efforts. In philatelic competitions you are dealing with the opinions of the judges, and, by definition, opinions vary according to personalities. *People who feel that they can't accept constructive comments should forego competitions and limit themselves to entering non-competitive exhibits and/or observing the exhibits of others.*

A collection vs. an exhibit: A collection is usually an album housing stamps and possibly other philatelic material. An exhibit is a philatelic story, expressed through stamps (and/or other philatelic material) and write-ups. Not everyone can win gold awards, naturally, but everyone can put together an exhibit that will attract interest and draw praise from the viewers. This is an important consideration entering an exhibit in a stamp show.

There are differences between collecting, displaying and exhibiting:
>>>In collecting, you please yourself.
>>>In displaying, you try to please your audience.
>>>In exhibiting, you hope to please the judges.

Since no two exhibits are alike, and each one reflects the personality of the exhibitor, it is NOT possible to give a step-by-step outline that will work in all cases. However, these general steps and suggestions should help you to create an interesting and personally satisfying exhibit – one that will get you started in the enjoyment of exhibiting.

Story line: Before you read any further, recall some of the fairy tales of your youth or your children's childhood. They started with "Once upon a time...", then proceeded, step by step, to the ending "...and they lived happily ever after." There were no flashbacks or interruptions in the flow of the story line. That is your aim in creating an exhibit – to have a definite beginning (your title page); a 'story line' that flows with no digressions, and a definite ending (without actually saying "The End").

I would not enter a contest where I didn't know the rules.

As part of this package there is a copy of the back (explanation side) of the judging sheet used in the GRVPA. It is there as a reference.

What judges hope to see: In brief, an exhibit needs a visually distinct *title page*, with a larger/bolder title, an introductory statement and a plan or outline (like a table of contents) to show how the exhibit is organized. The exhibit has to *show planning and development*, with a beginning (your title page), the middle (the bulk of your exhibit) and a conclusion. There should be evidence to the viewers of *knowledge* and some *personal study* about your subject. The *philatelic material* included should be in the best condition that you can find (preferably with some challenge in assembly). The exhibit should have *visual appeal,* with neat, balanced pages with an uncluttered look. The text has to be easy to read and follow.

At an exhibit judges will first read the title page to sense what the exhibitor is trying to accomplish. They will then step back to get an overview of the exhibit. They might examine several pages closely, but they are under definite time restraints. *(At the Oxford show in 2004 the three judges had jut 9 seconds per page including the time to make their notes for 160 frames! More judges have been used since then!)* Their assessment can be summarized in a few general questions: (1) Has the exhibitor done what he/she said was going to be done? (2) How well was this done? (3) Is the material good? (4) Does the exhibit look attractive?

Suggested tools: To me, foremost should be your philatelic (and thematic) references, to show that you have done some personal study. The other items include: (1) your philatelic material; (2) mounting materials (hinges, mounts, corners); (3) a supply of 7 or 8 pocket stock pages; (4) paper, pencils, scissors, and a soft eraser; (5) a clear plastic metric ruler; (6) your write-up equipment; (7) your exhibit pages and page protectors (preferably open only at the top); (8) card stock (65 pound or so) to act as stiffeners behind your exhibit pages; (9) a clean, flat work surface; and, (10) plenty of time. *(For storage I suggest D-ring binders to keep pages in protectors.)*

Suggested steps: Carefully read all these pages then:
(1) Pick your subject.
(2) In pencil, draft a possible title, introduction and plan. Put it aside, in a safe place, for future reference.
(3) Place your philatelic material on the stock pages in the approximate order given in your plan.
(4) Draft your write-ups for each item/prospective page, then cut the paper into sections and place the write-ups with the related items on the stock pages.
(5) Rearrange the philatelic items and write-ups until you feel that the pages are balanced and your material is in a logical order.
(6) Re-do your write-ups in final form to match your philatelic items, but not on the exhibit pages, yet. Measure them for fit and lightly mark in pencil on your exhibit pages where the write-ups and philatelic items will go.
(7) Then print your write-ups on the exhibit pages.
(8) Mount your material, erasing all obvious positional markings.
(9) Lightly pencil the page number on the back at the top, then put the page and a stiffener into a sheet protector, then into the binder
(10) Pick a short, suitable title, Construct your title page*, being sure that your plan includes only items actually in the exhibit. Put it into its page protector in the binder, with stiffener.
(11) Work on your synopsis page*, and store it, too, in the binder. Now you are ready to enter your exhibit in the next show!

*Title and synopsis pages are explained later.

Write-ups: Avoid; (1) ALL CAPITAL LETTERS; (2) **Fonts meant for titles;** (3) *Everything in italics;* (4) *Script fonts,* and, (5) **Everything in bold.** All are very hard to read in paragraphs.

Text in a combination of upper and lower case (as here) can be read 20% faster and with 20% greater comprehension that can text in all capital letters.

There are three main methods of putting your write-ups on your pages: (1) by hand printing; (2) by typewriter and (3) by computer. The first one is a dying art. It requires practice on scrap paper; light lines ruled on the final page; then the printing done in pencil before inking over with waterproof black ink. After drying overnight (to assure no smears) the pencil lines are then erased.

With a typewriter a new ribbon and clean roller, type and paper guides are a must. If you use this method use a correction tape to correct errors, not "white out". One caution – never underline all capitals used for emphasis. That is overkill!

Most exhibitors now use a computer for their write-ups. The ability to see and correct errors on screen is a bonus for two-finger typists like me.

Every exhibit must tell its own story. It must answer Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How about your philatelic material.

Write-ups should generally be <u>under</u> the materials to which they refer (except for headings). Short paragraphs can be put beside some items for page balance. Text should not butt against the material – leave some white "breathing space" around the items.

Choice of fonts: Your text font should be light and readable at arm's length or frame-viewing distance. Consider 11 or 12 points, for ease of reading by older eyes. Headings (and sub-headings) can be slightly larger, maybe in bold or a different font. Captions can be as small as 8 points, if you use them.

Most people find reading text in a serifed font, as here, easier than they can read the same text in a sans-serif font. Some suggested fonts that can be found on most (non Mac) computers are: Book Antiqua, Bookman Old Style, Calisto MT, Garamond, Goudy Old Style and Times New Roman. Experiment – try a few sentences in each font at 11 or 12 points, including some numbers, and see which one you like best, then use it.

Line spacing: Single spacing (as here) is easier to read for most people than space-an-a-half or double spacing. Use the line spacing preset on your computer for the font of your choice.

Text: Your write-ups should relate to the material on that page. Try to limit the number of "long" paragraphs. Ones over 5 or 6 lines in length the width of the page tend to be difficult to read, and can be boring! Your longest lines of text should be about 176 mm long, at the longest. *(That will leave white side margins of 20 mm.)* <u>Rarely use lines this long!</u> You can use short paragraphs to help balance material on your pages. The fewer words you can use to get your point across the more

the viewers will learn in the few seconds of attention that they can afford to give every page.

To justify or not: That is your choice. Some like "ragged right", others don't. In either case please leave your spell checker on, and have someone else check the spelling before you type your "final" pages.

Don't repeat the obvious: Viewers can see a block of four, a used stamp, a 2 cent red stamp, etc. Your text should supplement your material, not dominate it. Keep catalogue numbers off the front of your pages. *(They are copyrighted.)* If you need them, put them on the backs of the pages. Keep in mind the four C's of writing: <u>clear</u>, <u>complete</u>, <u>concise</u> and <u>correct</u>. The basic concept is to keep it simple – the simpler the better. Above all, don't repeat your title on every page, that's a throw-back to printed album pages.

Exhibit pages: Experienced exhibitors prefer plain, not punched, non-bordered pages since they give a larger mounting area. Look for white, or off-white, acid-free paper, in 24 or 28 pound weight to better support your material. *(If you are using a computer, check to see if your printer will handle the 28 pound paper.)* If you pick a page with a light quadrille-lined background be sure that the design is not obtrusive. *(Anything that draws attention away from stamps and covers on a page is detrimental.)* Never mount stamps outside the borders of any printed background.

Always <u>get a larger supply of exhibit pages than you think you will need</u>, since you will spoil some pages, no matter how carefully you work.

Page Layout: If you do use pages with printed borders please don't mount too close to the borders. Also, (long) covers should not cross the printed borders. *(More reasons to use plain, non-bordered pages.)* In any case, your pages should have both balance and symmetry. Balance means grouping material on the page so it is pleasing to the eyes. Symmetry means groupings on the left side of a vertical centre line visually "match" those on the right side. *(See "A layout grid," below.)*

Mounting: If mounting sets, try to keep the same spacing between stamps on every page, both horizontally and vertically. Mount stamps in straight, horizontal rows to make write-ups easier to place. In a set with different sized stamps, opt for visual appeal over value order – any larger stamps should be mounted last in the series. Use simple arrangements, but try for some variety. *(Viewing a series of "cookie cutter" pages is boring!)* Try to have the longest line of stamps on your page about one-third of the way down the mounting area. *(See below.)* Keep things "up" on your page to avoid a bottom-heavy look.

If you use black mounts for your stamps use a guillotine -type cutter to keep equal narrow borders on all sides of the stamps. *(With clear mounts, any irregular borders are a lot less obvious!)* Do not use black photo corners for covers. Use clear mounting corners to anchor covers and souvenir sheets. Try three corners, omitting the one at the top right to avoid interference with the stamps. You **may** lap covers, if needed.

If you have a lot of covers in your exhibit, plan ahead to avoid "railway tracks" – side-by-side pages with two covers on a page at about the same levels. *(At an angle from the side they do resemble railway tracks.)*

A layout grid: Even when using a page making program to prepare my exhibits *(Microsoft Publisher)* I still find that a layout grid is useful in planning my new pages.

To make one for an un-punched page, use a standard size piece of typing paper or exhibit page. From the left margin mark pencil dots at 20, 79, 137 and 196 mm, near the top and bottom of the page. Next, from the top, place similar dots at 20, 98, 176 and 254 mm, near both sides. Using the dots, draw a frame (heavily) connecting the outside pairs of dots. This will give a frame with borders of 20 mm at the top and sides and 25 mm at the bottom. Next draw two horizontal and two vertical lines using the other dots. This will divide your initial frame into nine rectangles. *(See sketch at right.)*

Hold this ruled page up behind one of your exhibit pages against the light. The outer frame represents the standard mounting area. Where the grid lines cross are the focal points on the page. As previously noted your longest line of stamps should fall at or very near the upper third line. To attract the most attention to a special philatelic item, try to place it at/very near one of the upper focal points. (Also leave more "white space" around it.)

If you use a underline punched page, pace the horizontal dots at 25, 82, 139 and 196 mm, to allow for the punched holes. The vertical measurements are the same. This gives top/right borders of 20 mm and left/lower ones of 25 mm.
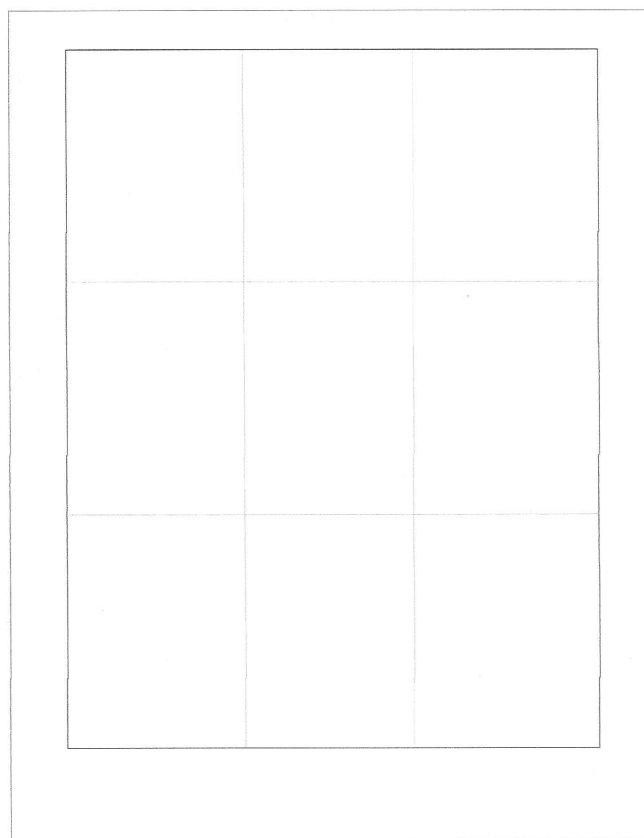
Avoid any material or write-up below that bottom line! Some exhibit frames use a folded strip of paper to support the exhibit pages and it might cover anything low on your page.

Use this layout grid with your philatelic material and cut out initial write ups. Move the items around the page until it pleases you. *(I would make a sketch of where everything was, maybe with measurements from the sides and top, so as not to forget!)*

The squint test: Hold your completed pages at arms length then squint while looking at them. Your *material* should be what draws your eyes, not your text or mounts. If the text draws your attention then you should seriously consider shrinking the length of the text and reworking the page.

Re-writing: You must be ready for disappointments, once you begin to exhibit competitively. Re-writing and re-mounting will be needed before most exhibits reach their full potential. It is a lot of work, but it is worth the effort to see your philatelic items on display. Don't forget to re-write your title page to include any changes that you made to the exhibit!

The Title Page: This is the first page planned and one of the last to be completed. It tells the viewers that this is the start of an exhibit. It introduces the subject to the viewers and describes what is in the exhibit. The title

(Sketch is for illustration only, and is NOT to scale.)

proper should be in a slightly larger size (and darker) for easier reading. It can be in a different font from your text. (Body text should be in the same font and size as on exhibit pages.) It should not be large enough to be read from across the room! Your introduction should expand upon the title and describe the scope or limits of the exhibit. It should not be more that, say, 35 to 50 words, maximum. Consider using short paragraphs, as here, rather than long ones. You also need a plan, an outline or a statement of organization to tell the viewers the sequence and arrangement of your exhibit, hopefully telling "where to find what" by giving page references to sections, etc.

A Synopsis Page: Like the title page, this is prepared *after* the rest of the exhibit is completed. This page allows you to share more details about your exhibit with the judges – they are they *only* people who see this page.

Repeat your title (smaller!) and opening statement, only, from your title page. Here you can further explain the exhibit and its contents in a concise but comprehensive manner. You may tell why some of the material was hard to find. You may explain what is not there, if a "missing" item is very rare. If some of your items are "rare" explain why they are rare. You may explain the time it has taken to accumulate material for the exhibit. You may explain why you organized it in the manner that you did. If the exhibit topic is out of the ordinary, you may give one (or two) easy-to-find references to help the judges with their homework.

Ken Magee, 25.10.09