GUIDELINES FOR EXHIBIT CURATION
UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH, ARCHIVAL AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Preliminary Steps

1. Choose a topic, which is of interest to you, original, and supported by available primary resources (rare books, maps, photographs, art work, etc.)
2. Review the Exhibit Policy and associated documents on the Library's website
3. Contact the Special Collections Librarian in Archival & Special Collections (mamcafee@uoguelph.ca or 519.824.4120 x58927) at least 5 months in advance of the intended installation date to indicate your intent to put forward an exhibit proposal application. At that initial consultation, you will be instructed on how to submit the exhibit proposal application.
4. Submit exhibit proposal application at least four months in advance of the intended installation of exhibit . The Exhibit Committee reviews proposals as received.

Research

1. Identify the purpose and intended audience of the exhibition. The reason for your exhibition could be the promotion of a rare book or archival collection; outreach to donors; a pedagogical project; a scholarly project, celebration or commemoration or an important event or person. In addition, identify the intended audience, such as scholars, college students, K-12 students, members of the local community, and donors. Consider the level of writing and the extent and depth of coverage of the topic.

2. Conduct research on your topic: Discuss your ideas with experts in the field, such as faculty members, graduate students, librarians, archivists, museum curators, and conservators.

3. Develop an outline of the exhibit with several key sections.

Curation

Put in the simplest terms, *curation* means the selection and arrangement of objects and text in an exhibit case or on a website.

1. Selection of Objects: Items, such as rare books archives, photos, art work, memorabilia, and maps, should be germane to the exhibition and enhance understanding of the topic. If all items cannot be illustrated, the most significant or visually arresting should be chosen for reproduction. Choose objects that have historical significance to your topic and have visual appeal; the range of objects featured must convey a thorough sense of the topic.

2. Get permission from the archives, rare book or special collections department to use original materials in the exhibit or to digitize them. Consult with the curators of the collection (e.g. Special Collections Librarian for Archival & Special Collections at the U of G) as early as possible in the development of your exhibition on preservation and

conservation issues. Some materials may be too fragile to exhibit. Others may require stabilization or conservation work before they can be exhibited.

3. To request materials from Archival & Special Collections, please complete an online request form on the ASC Reference Services place. In the "Notes" box, please indicate that the materials will be in an exhibit: cite name of exhibit, location of exhibit, and dates item will be in it.

Installation Plan

1. Clear construction and function of the design of your exhibition should be your primary goal to enable and inspire the audience to think about and understand the topic of your exhibition. To be effective, relevant, stimulating, and enjoyable to the viewer, exhibitions should be prepared and designed in a meaningful and purposeful manner

2. Chose consistent color scheme, margins, fonts, and, layout schemes. The design of an exhibition should work in practical as well as in aesthetic terms. Ease of navigation is of paramount importance. The typographical design and arrangement should not interfere with legibility. Contrast between objects and background is important. Proximity between objects can imply relationships, so it is important to place a caption or subtitle close to image for association. Repetitive design elements such as using the same font, color, size, texture also can help to make associations and relationships. Color is the principal way the mind separate elements in space and chooses something to focus on. Use rich, bright colors sparingly and only for emphasis.

3. Both physical and online exhibitions should conform to AODA guidelines (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005).

4. Complete an Installation Plan to review with Special Collections Librarian or Head, Archival & Special Collections

EXHIBIT LABEL STYLE GUIDE

(Adapted from the University of Florida Library Exhibition Style Guide and Beverly Serrell's Exhibit Labels: A Step-by-Guide.)

The exhibit curator(s) will write all exhibit text. The labels should be reviewed by an expert in the subject area and writing specialist to ensure they are accurate, easy to understand, convey the intended message and are consistent with the overall style and theme of the exhibit

Types of Labels

1. Interpretative Labels tell stories. They are narratives, not a list of facts. Interpretation should strictly align with the exhibit theme and be as direct as possible. Write as you would speak, avoiding extraneous or repetitive information. More lengthy interpretation can be made via handouts, brochures, and catalogues. Interpretive labels will be easier to write and will make more sense to visitors if the exhibition has a single focus that unifies all its parts. Good labels are guided by a strong cohesive exhibit plan – a theme, story or communication goal – that sets that tone and limits the content Exhibition text should be engaging and accessible to a wide audience without diluting the content. Information should be up to date and free of technical or

industry specific jargon. Use short paragraphs with varying lengths of sentences. Think of questions visitors would ask themselves, as these are usually the best questions to be answered by labels. Credit lines and/or panels are not just for donors, they are essential for staff accountability and morale.

2. Attribution Labels are comprised of:

Bibliographic/Artifact information + Credit (Repository or lender) + Donor info

(Bibliographic Info): Creator/Title/Extent (e.g. total number of pages for a book)/Place of publication/Publisher/Date/

(Credit): Name of Repository or lender

(Donor): Gift of (name of donor)

Text Style:

- Avoid the use of all caps (except titles)
- Don't hyphenate at line breaks
- Don't use citations or footnotes
- Use italics sparingly
- Use single space after periods
- Use contemporary place names for the period being discussed, with the modern name in parenthesis
- Use accents where appropriate for foreign names

Fabrication of Label and Facsimiles

Use white paper or colored paper in a light shade that does not hinder readability. Borders (either printed or label mounted onto colored paper) can be used to add color. Dry mount labels onto board or foam core for support using twin mount paper

Print labels in black ink. Ok to use color for emphasis or as a design element.

All exhibit text will be printed in **Arial font**. Font size should be increased proportionately according to the distance of the reader from the label. Recommended point size listed below.

- **Titles:** 14-16 point and bolded
- **Interpretive text:** 12-14 point
- **Attribution text**: 12-14 point
- **Exhibit Running Titles at bottom of each label:** 10-11 point (useful to use running labels for cases on first floor to enforce exhibit theme)

Labels should be displayed at an angle that is still readable for patrons in wheelchairs. Use wedges or triangles made out of board to prop up labels

Labels should not come in direct contact with exhibit materials.

1. For physical exhibits text, labels, and printed facsimiles should be dry mounted on board (include thickness) in order to prevent curling.

2. The Manager of Library Communications, together with the Special Collections Librarian, will provide appropriate branding and credit lines for the exhibition and distribution and use about it by the press.

Online Exhibits

- The Library uses the Omeka platform for online exhibits. Please review the Exhibit Builder Plugin page and "Getting Started with Project Planning" in the documentation section before developing your online exhibition.
- As the Web is non-linear, good navigation is essential to allow an audience to figure out where they are and where they might like to go next .
- Different browsers interpret HTML coding differently, which can change the look and feel of an online exhibition.

Selected Exhibition Sites

ACRL - Rare Books & Manuscripts Section (RBMS) Exhibition Awards

 Omeka Showcase

Smithsonian Libraries – Archival and Library Exhibits on the Web

Virtual Museum of Canada

Selected Readings on Library Exhibition Planning & Curation

General

Kemp, Jane and Laura Witschi, compilers. *Displays and Exhibits in College Libraries*. Chicago: ACRL, 1997.

Keith, Brian, et al. "Broadening Impact for Library Exhibitions and Speakers". *Journal of Library Administration*, 57:389–405, 2017.

Matessa, Freda. *Organizing Exhibitions: A Handbook for Museums, Libraries, and Archives*. London: Facet, 2014.

RBMS Conference Sessions (Iowa City, 2017)
- Panel: The Narrative of Exhibition and Exhibitions Practices: Approaches to Design and Execution" https://alair.ala.org/handle/11213/8573
- Every Space is special: The art and science of Pop up Special Collections Exhibits https://alair.ala.org/handle/11213/8562
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Serrell, Beverly. Making Exhibit Labels: A Step-by-Step Guide!. Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1983.

Smithsonian Institution. Exhibition Standards. Washington, DC: Office of Policy and Management, August 2002.

Smithsonian Institution. Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design.

Swanick, Charlie, et. "Curating Exhibitions in Academic Libraries: Practical Steps" *Practical Academic Librarianship: The International Journal of the SLA Academic Division*.5(2):1-22, 2015

Taylor, Michael L. " Special Collections Exhibition: How They Pay Dividends to your Library". *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage*.19:2 (2018).

Visser, M. (2004). Considerations in the preparation of library exhibits featuring rare books and manuscripts. College & Undergraduate Libraries, 11(2), 51-62.

Online Exhibitions

Kalfatovic, Martin. *Creating a Winning Online Exhibition: A Guide for Libraries, Archives, and Museums*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2002.

National Initiative for a Network Cultural Heritage. *NINCH Guide to Good Practice in the Digital Representation and Management of Cultural Heritage Materials*. Glasgow & Washington, DC.: NINCH, 2004

Puglia, Steven, Jeffrey Reed, and Erin Rhodes. *Technical Guidelines for Digitizing Cultural Heritage Materials: Creation of Raster Image Files.* Washington, DC: Federal Agencies Digitization Initiative, 2009