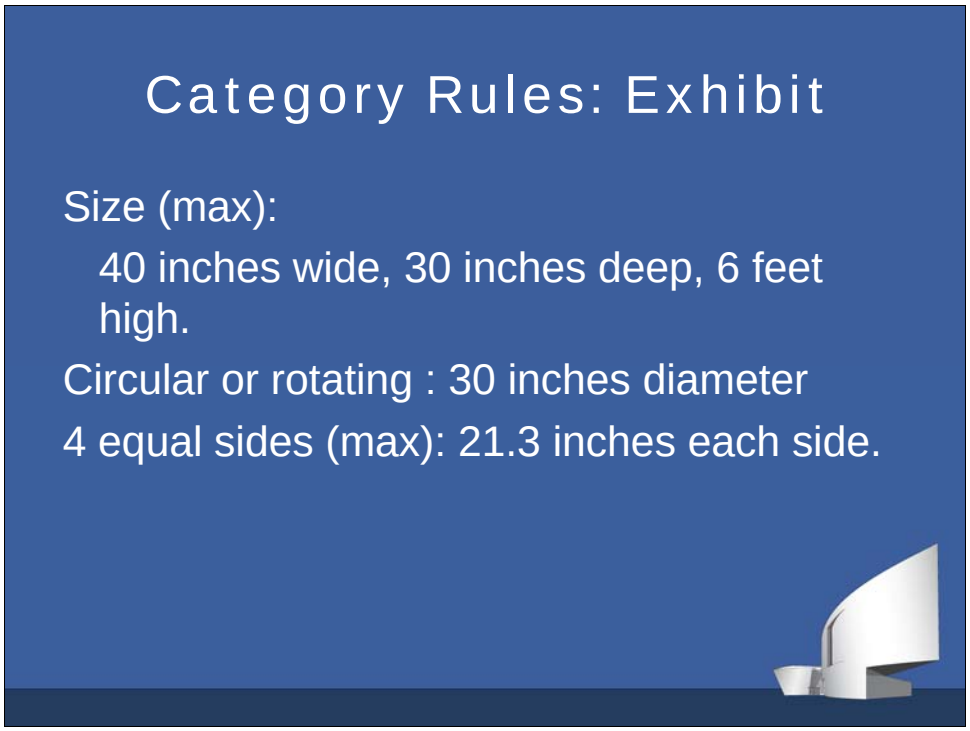
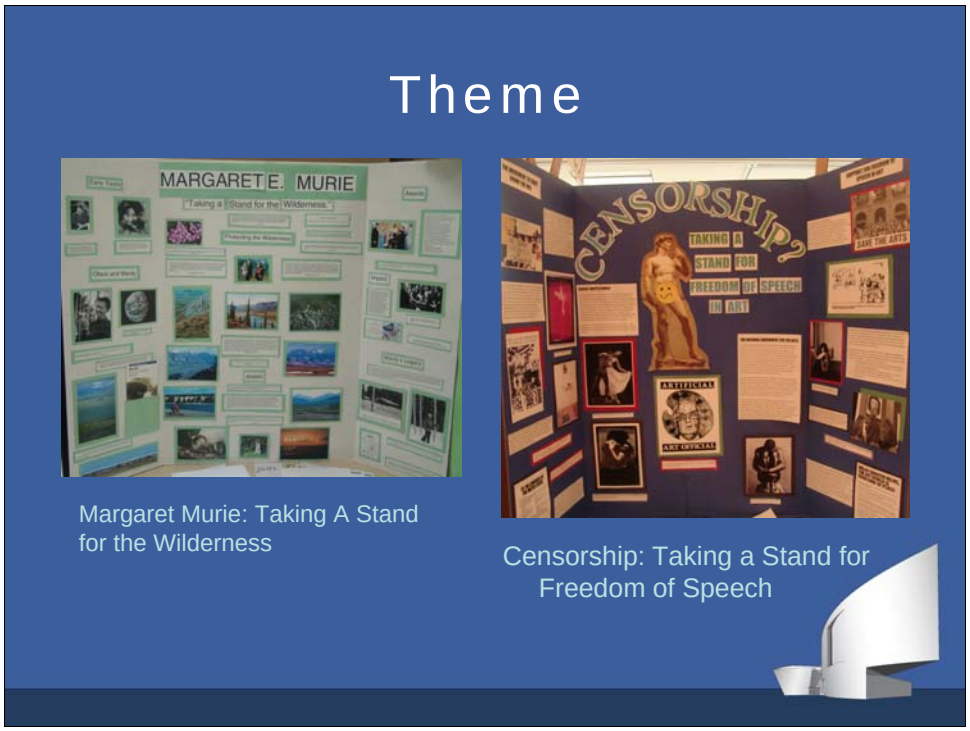
Original Presentation made by Wanda Chin, Exhibition and Design Director at the University of Alaska Museum of the North, on November 29, 2006.



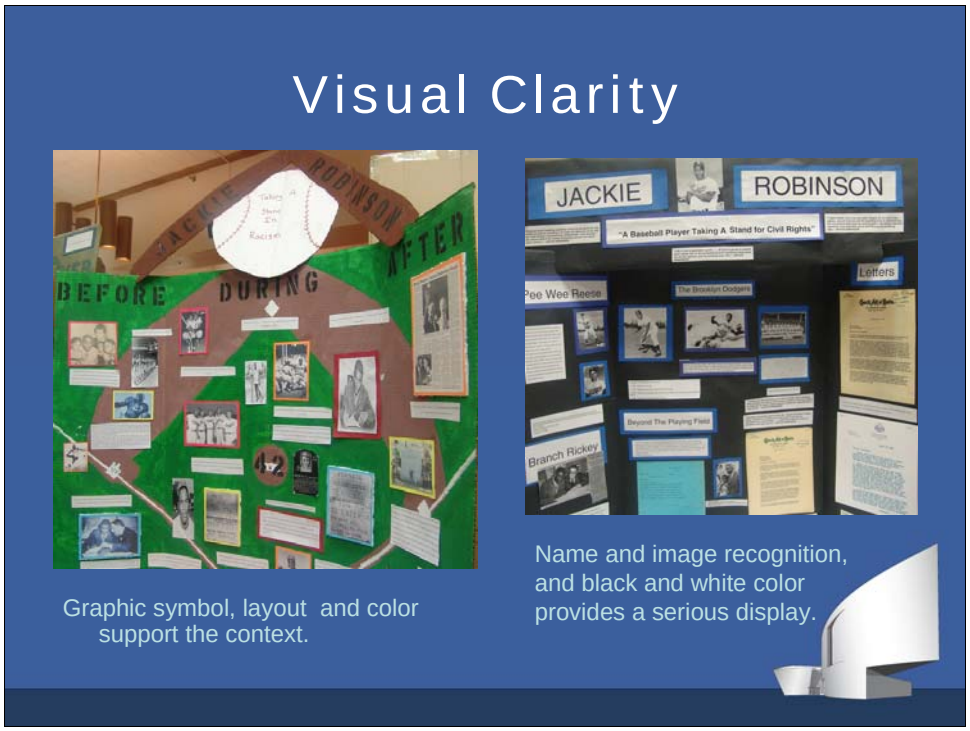
NHD regulations dictate the maximum size of the exhibit.

National History Day standards for judging exhibits.

The intent of the National History Day exhibit is to show historical content and analysis. Graphics and artwork need to support your story and research. Notice the difference between these two examples. The outstanding painting on the right just needed a story to make it an effective exhibit.

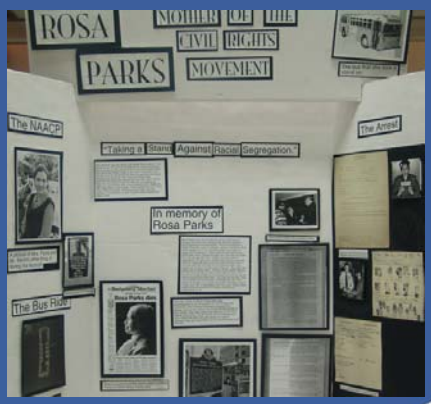


National History Day has a theme for every year. In 2006, the theme was 'Taking a Stand.' For 2007, the theme is 'Triumph & Tragedy.'



Different tools of page layout and exhibiton design can help to clearly communicate the content of an exhibit. We examine these tools over the next few slides.

Visual Impact



Artifacts, objects, and images
Create an experience.

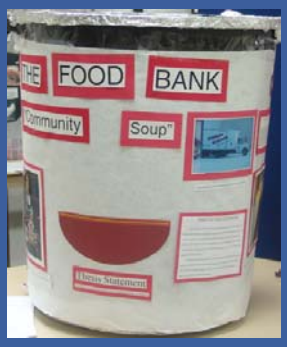
Graphics and Layout

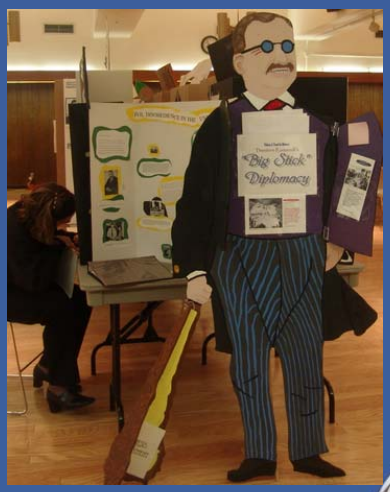
Celebrities Taking a Stand: Finding a Cure for Cancer

Feminism During WWII Era

Use colors and layout to make your exhibit stand out from across the room

Size and Shape





Size, shape, and material dramatically communicates your subject and theme.

Virtual Exhibit Makeover

Design by Kirsten Pickard, Multimedia Specialist, UA Museum of the North

Comments by Wanda Chin, Exhibition and Design Director

This exhibit example shows some common misperceptions about display design and layout. Bright colors, bold headline on a wavy line and text captions on tilt get attention do get attention. Lots of pictures and graphs do make it appear more fun and interesting. But does it communicate the story idea and move you through the presentation?

Color and contrast. Select colors that support the exhibit subject, theme, story, and intent. Change background and color of title (headline) to something appropriate to subject. Look at the images you have seen in your research – what colors do you see? Try selecting a neutral color or a tint of a color less intense ('low-chroma' colors) but in the same color group for the background color. With contrast your photographs appear brighter and stand out from the background. Brighter colors can be used for highlights, dramatic graphics, and your title.

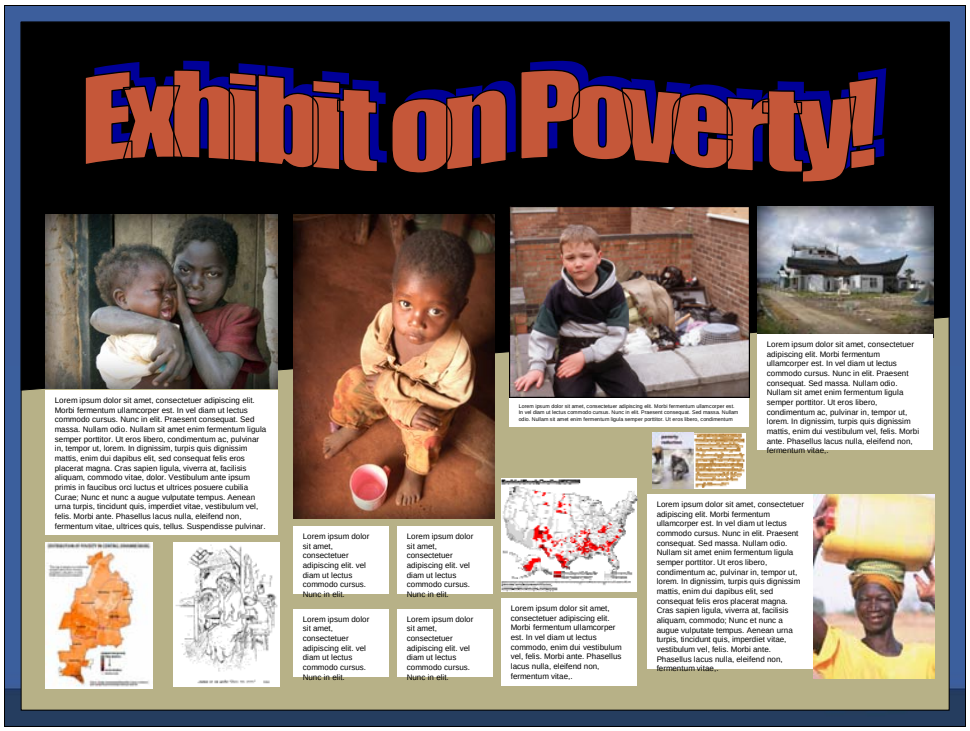
Add one or two accent colors to create some drama – black works well for this subject. When planning your exhibit, draw these ideas out before you execute them, to ensure good composition! Here we use a slight diagonal line bisecting the colors for our composition.

Examine and Select Images

Organize your images (photographs, maps, illustrations, charts, etc.) so they help tell your story and answer the basic information of who, what, when, where, how, and why. If you have choices, which set of images gets your attention--black and white, monochromatic (left) or full-color (right).

Photo Selection

Which picture is commands the strongest attention? Similar composition – but higher contrast of colors and the solitary figure with identifiable facial features on the right is more likely to catch someone's eye from a distance. Even in black and white, solitary, large, central figures and recognizable features (hands, forms, faces) will get more attention.



Layout and allocation of space.

Now we have noticeable images, but lack of white space (margins and areas between elements) and the competition of many same-sized elements makes it hard to distinguish what idea goes where. Photos are all same size and are competing with each other.

Layout of space and hierarchy continued: Place space around objects to separate ideas. To ‘pop out’ certain ideas use color frames (only a few!) and pull quotes. Use bright colors, but be careful they don’t reduce your color photos of their color intensity! Try to use the same color – one that makes sense for your subject – to unify all frames. A darker, saturated color like burgundy or hunter green will stand out against a more neutral background and still keep your content at the foreground.

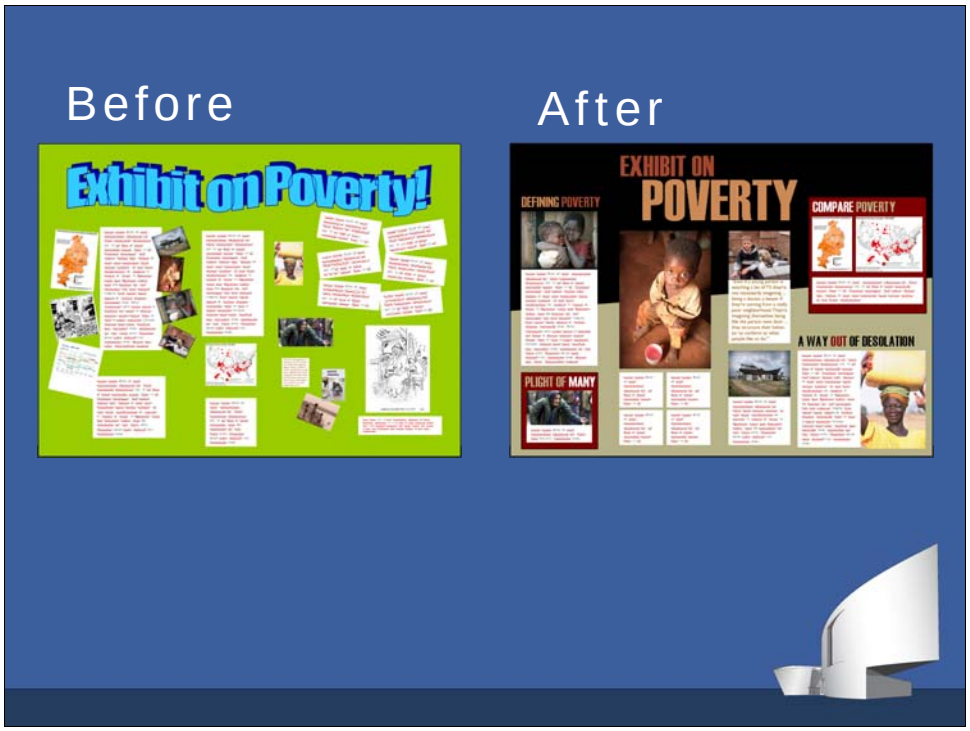
Typography – Fonts convey ideas!

The original title is too ‘fun’ for a subject like poverty. Here are eight different choices – what feeling does each one convey, or what sort of place or object does it make you think of? Different people will have various associations with the font. The 2nd above lower right-- Haettenschweiller –is serious and straightforward and is easy to read from a distance – an important factor for choosing your typeface!

Typography continued – Using typefaces effectively. Size and color here are used to draw out the main subject of the exhibit. We've achieved a hierarchy of information using color, contrast, space, layout, image selection, and typography. Add some visual interest now for polish – some small accents and guiding information.

Typography and Fine-tuning: Subtitles and some slight movement of information (always sketch out your exhibit ahead of time to accommodate these sorts of changes!). Now there is more interest and even from a distance the viewer is drawn in to learn more. However, bright white contrasts with the background in some places so much that it competes with the main title – the eye is drawn to ‘Definining Poverty’ more than or as much as to the main title.

Fine-tune to improve the final result. A modest use of contrast and color to highlight keywords in subtitles. This exhibit's content is clear, easy-to-understand quickly, and information is available for different audience needs. Viewers and judges are drawn in to learn more by organized information groups--images and subtitles. What else could be done? Use a quote, write effective captions, add real objects to extend the exhibit subject and experience. But even without these improvements, this exhibit appears effective and polished!

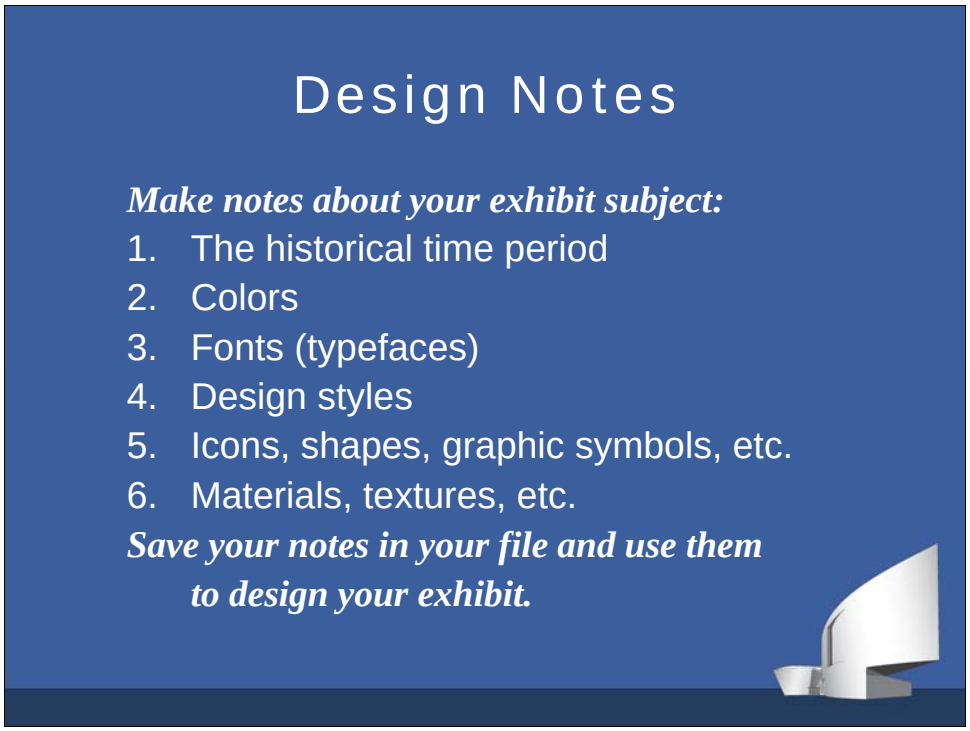


Before and After. See and consider the changes in tone, readability, clarity, human emphasis, attention-grabbing nature of each exhibit.

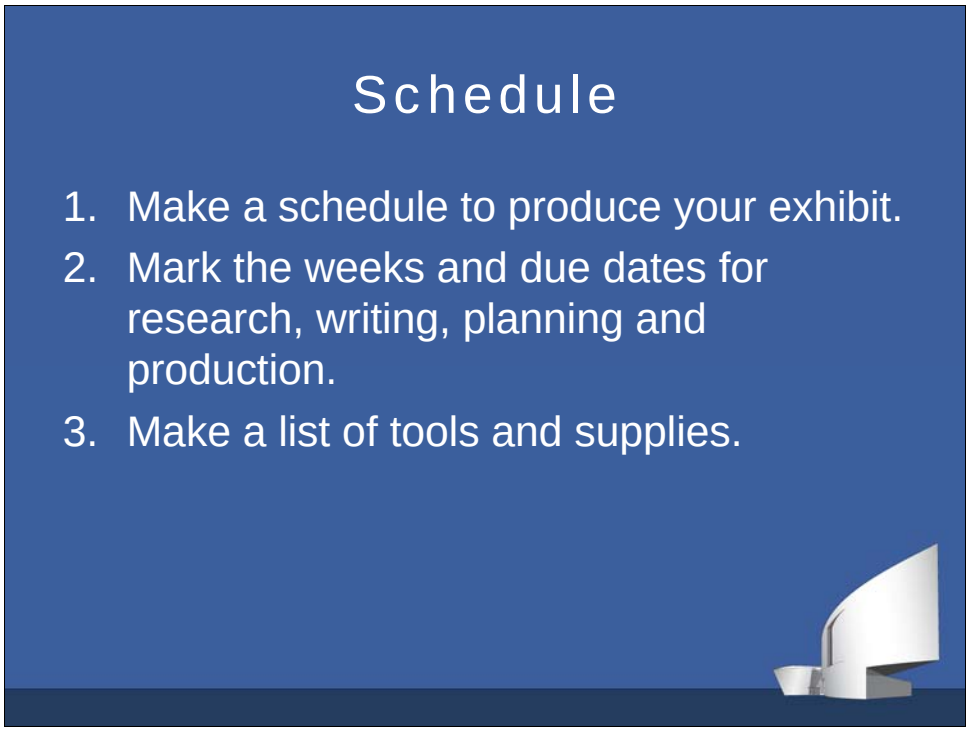
UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA MUSEUM OF THE NORTH

Design Methods

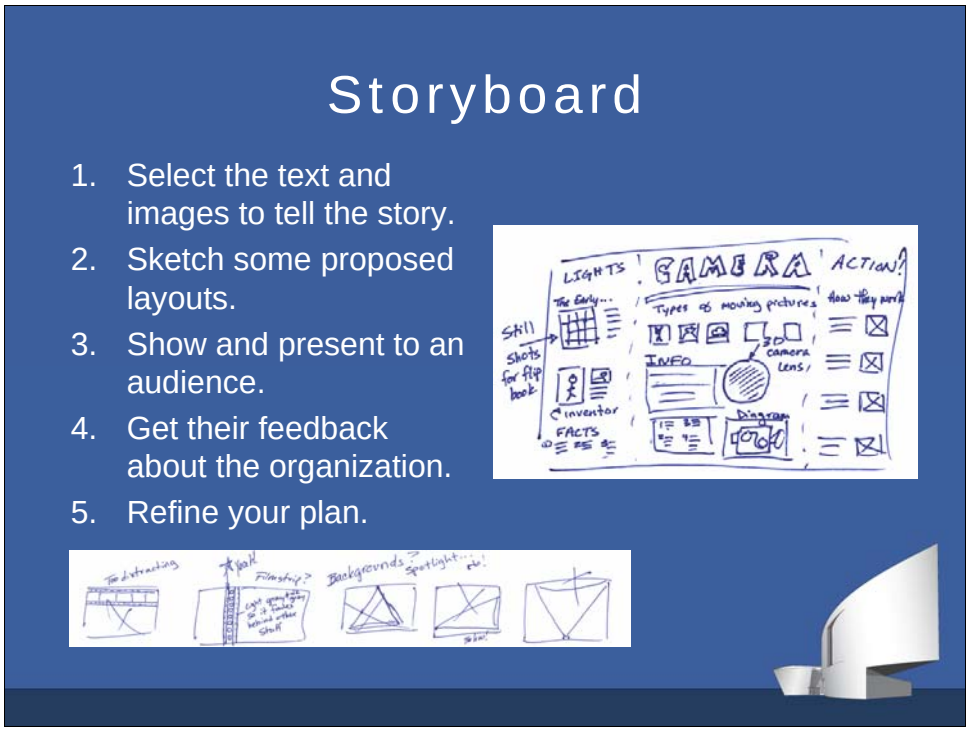
Tips to Exhibit Planning



As you are researching your exhibit, it is a good idea to jot down recurring themes within your subject such as those listed. These will be invaluable when you begin to plan your exhibit.

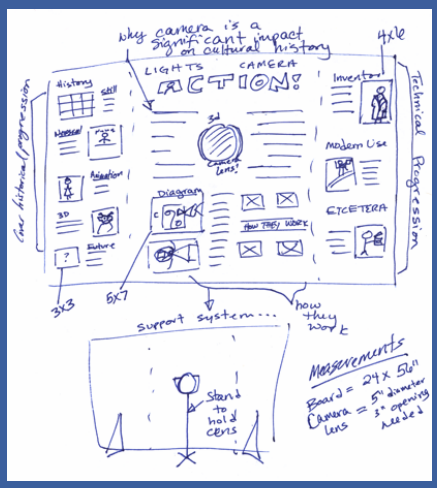


Use a calendar to plan and block out time for research, writing, designing and producing the exhibit. It allows you to see how much time and what kind of exhibit you can realistically make. It helps you organize your materials and where and when you need some help. (For example, a ride to the store to get supplies the night before the exhibit is due!)



Drawing out a plan for your exhibit will significantly improve your final result. Once you begin refining your information, use a ruler, or consider making a mock-up of your plan using xeroxed or low-quality print-outs of your information to make sure your planning is accurate. Doing a little extra work now will save you from emergencies and disasters!

Exhibit Production



1. Sketch ideas of the exhibit physical support.
2. Review the resources needed to complete the production.
3. Select and draw plans for creating the exhibit.
4. Specify and get the materials.
5. Begin construction.

Consider the structural aspects of your exhibit – plan your construction to make it sturdy!

A general outline of type sizes to use for your exhibit.