

## Workshop #1 – Let's Get Started

It doesn't matter if you are new to the hobby or have been a stamp collector most of your life, exhibiting should become a fundamental extension of every stamp collection. Many collectors are afraid to create an exhibit. Some like to fill empty spaces in their albums, but take no time to learn about the stamps they mount. Others may think the stamps they would talk about are common, not rare, or perhaps they believe exhibiting requires special talents. Let me help dissolve that level of thinking; "Exhibiting is for everyone who likes to tell others about their collections."

That's it... no special requirements — Yagottawanna (you've got to want to).

Exhibiting is the most sophisticated and disciplined form of show-and-tell. It is the expanded version of show-and-tell which allows an audience to learn by observing your exhibit and then asking you questions about the material. Philatelic audiences are better informed as a result of the exhibitor's efforts. The primary objective of this workshop is to discover the exhibitor inside each of YOU.

What is a philatelic story? How do I build an exhibit? The exhibitor should think about these minimum "things" when considering an exhibit:

- a) Select a topic you like and learn everything about it
- b) Select stamps that support your topic from material you already have, or could acquire with minimal effort
- c) Know your financial boundaries and scope of material availability – remember the saying about how to eat an elephant... "in little bites".
- d) Be prepared to work; the more energy you invest, the more interest surfaces from those around you
- e) Do you enjoy research? Here's where you become the expert in your chosen topic
- f) Organize the material for your exhibit to support the story you are telling; don't copy the catalog's (date-of-issue) outline.

Create a story about stamps from your collections. It is possible to rush around and buy stamps to build an exhibit, but you might be disappointed if the "key" items you need to complete the story are not available. The story behind a philatelic exhibit is a display created from stamps, covers, or a combination of these artifacts, expressed through the presentation of that material, combined with words, to explain the knowledge you possess about the subject you chose to talk about.

A good example of how to create a story is to invite a friend to your home, pull one of your favorite albums off the shelf, open it, point to some stamps, and begin telling everything you know about the material and why it is important to you. It's that simple. The idea is to have some fun sharing your knowledge with others. The story you tell can be anything you want it to be. Here is an important point... if, while telling the story, you hesitate during the narrative, forget some important facts, or discover something might be missing, make some notes about each of those issues and get to work polishing your story (Alzheimer's or Dementia are not acceptable excuses for delivering an incomplete story).

Material in an exhibit is mounted on sheets of heavy-weight paper (e.g. 65 lb. cover stock), but arranged in the order you decide necessary to tell your story. Material on exhibit pages are not mounted in the same order they appear in stamp catalogs, unless your story follows the sequential date of issue outlined from the catalog. What might you include on exhibit pages to influence your story? How about written explanations and descriptions of the items being shown... using words, and sometimes with the aid of graphics.

For the MPS Club Exhibiting Program, you only need nine pages (or less) to tell your story. Your story might reflect on a specific postal service, period of time, place, phase of production, type of usage(s), constant plate flaws, or just about anything you can support from the material you own or "aspire to acquire". Your work begins by limiting your story so it can fit onto those nine exhibit pages. Do you remember the school assignments from English teachers; "Pick any subject you want and write a short story of 500 to 1,000 words before tomorrow's class?" Don't panic! Remember the elephant.

Here's a golden rule that one of my college professors said to me more than thirty years ago, "Write about the "things" you know about." That statement has helped me many times in life because we might want to tell a story about something we think is interesting, but if we don't know the facts, and can't stimulate interest with audiences, they will never begin to listen! Most of us tend to pick up a subject that is too large, so immediately begin to narrow your scope... get lean and mean. For Example:

- a) US Classic Bank Note Issues (huge)
- b) 10c US Classic Bank Note Issues (still too much)
- c) The 10c US Classic Bank Note Issues of 1863 (improved)
- d) Kansas City Postal Routes Showing Usage of the 10c US 1863 Issue (better)
- e) Color Varieties of the 10c US Classics of 1863 (best)

— or, try this —

- a) Worldwide Trains on Stamps (huge)
- b) Steam Trains on Stamps (still too much)
- c) Steam Trams & Cable Cars on Stamps (improved)
- d) Covers with postmarks from Kansas City Cable Cars (best)

Keep refining your exhibit's Title Page as you assemble the material. This is natural for most exhibitors: as you continue to select and organize material for your exhibit, you become more selective and refine the story's scope by removing unnecessary items. Sometimes, removing items to refine the story in one area creates a gaping hole that needs to be filled in another – now it's time to buy more material.

We will spend a lot of time practicing these objectives:

- a) Selecting material
- b) Creating rough-sketch outlines
- c) Keeping notes
- d) Acquiring and applying basic research notes
- e) Experiments (don't like your first attempt; do it again (tomorrow))
- f) Minimize procrastination (get at it (today)); set aside some time each day
- g) Refine, refine, refine

Here is one of the greatest tools you can use to build and refine your story, and it only costs some brain cells, "What material will I exhibit?" This is a very important question to consider because you can't tell a philatelic story without stamps. You have three options to choose from:

- a) Select material from your collections (easy)
- b) Select material from your collections and purchase the missing pieces (difficult)
- c) Purchase everything (sometimes difficult, sometimes easy)

**Note:** *The material in YOUR exhibit should belong to YOU and not be borrowed from another collector/exhibitor.*

Travel to a stamp show that offers exhibits, and start with a regional show. Before you go, understand those exhibits are constructed under rules beyond the scope of club exhibiting, but the techniques you learn can be applied to club exhibiting. Study the exhibits to learn how other exhibitors tell their stories, see how the material is mounted, and notice how words or word phrases are applied with stamps and graphics to carry the story from beginning to end. Some collectors go to shows only for exhibiting, not to buy stamps. Some do both. Between March and November every year, there are six shows that

offer exhibits within a comfortable driving distance from Kansas City – or, for extra fun, take a train:

- St. Louis area Stamp Clubs (St. Louis Stamp Expo), March 27-29, 2015
- Denver Philatelic Society (Rocky Mountain Stamp Show), May 16-18, 2014
- Oklahoma City Stamp Club (OKPEX), June 20-21, 2014
- Wichita Stamp and Coin Show, August 16-17, 2014
- Omaha Philatelic Society, September 6-7, 2014
- Chicago Philatelic Society (CHICAGOPEX), November 21-23, 2014

Most exhibits begin with a Title Page that acts as an introduction and lets audiences know why the exhibit is important to the exhibitor. The Title Page should specifically state what is being exhibited and provide an outline of the material shown. The outline should be a miniature road map, proceeding through each step in your story. It should point to the most significant items in your exhibit by applying thick ruled borders around them (more later). You might include a geographical map to quickly move your audience through various segments of history, or travel from one location to another, while establishing a visual time-line. That way, the person looking at your display can begin with a good idea of what they will see and how it will be presented.

You will make mistakes. Anyone can look at the same mistake within a group of words and never see the error. Have a friend carefully review your Title Page to catch those unwanted faux pas. The best critics are those who know nothing about stamp collecting or exhibiting. They might drive you nuts with questions you think are insignificant, but then again, think carefully... maybe what they see (or don't) will provide something important you overlooked.

An exhibitor must always be observant to recognize when a slight title change might improve the quality of their exhibit. During the construction of a new exhibit, I change the title frequently. As I create... I change. When I critique... I criticize myself, and by doing so... improve the quality of my story and the exhibit's purpose.

Some exhibitors build the Title Page first, then construct the remainder of the pages in their exhibit. Others prefer to develop an outline first and construct the Title Page last. If you follow the first statement, the Title Page will constantly experience revision as you create each exhibit page. If you follow an outline, the Title Page will experience fewer alterations. Choose what works best for you.

**Speaker** Here to tell you everything about Title Pages is Randy Neil.

Exhibitors use materials to build exhibit pages similar to those found in high-quality stamp albums: acid-free papers and safe plastic mounts. You can find these papers at most office supply stores. The information on exhibit pages should be neatly hand-lettered, typed, or computer-printed. Every page of the exhibit should show philatelic items. It is acceptable to include scanned images (reduced to 70 percent of the original size) to emphasize a stamp variety or point out the location of a printing error, but never to substitute the actual stamp. A good rule to use here is: no page should contain more than 30 percent of non-philatelic material.

This year, three club members have agreed to be mentors who will assist those who do not have a computer build their exhibit pages: Randy Neil, Rodger McReynolds, and Bob Burney. Ask any of these knowledgeable computer page builders for assistance.

The best exhibits include original research and a concise, well planned narrative. I find research and discovery the most rewarding aspect of exhibiting. Discovering new facts polished my story and the more I study, the better my delivery becomes. One of my self-satisfying moments during an exhibit is having people approach me with questions. That has happened on several occasions – even where the interested person will seek me out at a show! Those asking questions are not always judges wanting clarification... many are other exhibitors, and visitors becoming interested in stamp collecting. Some have become friends I look forward to visiting with every year.

There are many great resources to help with research, and among these is membership with the AAPE (American Association of Philatelic Exhibitors), <http://www.aape.org/>. Members receive a quarterly journal filled with very helpful suggestions from many exhibitors who share their knowledge. Here are some national philatelic libraries you may want to visit:

- American Philatelic Research Library
- Northwest Philatelic Library
- Rocky Mountain Philatelic Library
- San Diego Philatelic Library
- Scandinavian Collectors Club Library
- Western Philatelic Library
- Wineburgh Philatelic Research Library
- There are many, many, more – use the Internet!

## Creating a Story for a Philatelic Exhibit

Whatever I tell you, believe that I could change my mind. Whenever you hear from someone else, believe there is something they forgot to mention. Yes, that's correct. There is no single best answer for creating a story to support a philatelic exhibit. And it is work – a real labor of love. And it becomes habit forming, and you will wonder why you ever thought there was nothing to do beyond filling empty spaces on album pages. Now let me say this, about that...

When you are ready to construct a philatelic exhibit, deciding what your story (story-line) is, must be decided before proceeding to the next step – designing pages. The story is the purpose of your exhibit. Too many exhibitors try to design first, then, create the story to support the design. That gives room for incomplete data and stories that are out of sequence, hard to follow, or confusing to the exhibitor's audience.

Material mounted in an exhibit, whether randomly scattered across the pages, or aesthetically arranged must contain a cogent story, or they are not exhibits. Pages without a story are more closely related to stamp album pages or miniature collections. They follow the same general outline presented in stamp catalogues, which is sequential from first issue to last, and dry, and boring. Albums and catalogues are for reference, an archive of facts. Exhibits are for stimulating new learning, new discovery!

Let's choose a subject and see how it might be used in our Club Exhibiting Program. I am like many stamp collectors. I want just about everything related to philately, but cannot afford to buy it all. So, I refine my interests into smaller groups I like most, and make sure I have avenues for purchasing that material. As you begin to develop the exhibit's story, "narrow the scope".

Recently, I acquired a large assortment of ships and trains on stamps. These are popular thematic interests. I sorted through the material and decided I preferred ships with sails printed before 1950. After some conversation with club members and dealers, I decided ships would be a good area for developing a respectable collection, a portion of which would become an exhibit. Attempting to find and purchase all of the stamps in this area would not be practical, not even if I had deep pockets. Here is my plan for narrowing scope:

- Stamp design must show vessels with sails,
- printed (engraved print process) before 1950,
- used for exploration and defense,
- definitive stamps issued in sets or as singles,
- and from one British Empire colony – Jamaica?

If we were preparing for an organized philatelic exhibit, like those supported by APS or AAPE at WSP (World Series of Philately) shows, it might be necessary to refine the scope a bit further. This depends on many other factors, and rules which are not necessary for Club Exhibiting. The bulleted list above is simply an outline. Treat the outline like a budget. Refine it as you continue to acquire material. Make your material fit the story! A smart person once said, "The art of good writing is rewriting." And so it is with writing the story for your exhibit, regardless if you use words, pictures, or both.

As you can see, a mental vision about the material for my imaginary exhibit was formed while creating the outline. This was probably an interest sparked by previous research; something that attracted my attention, that I found enjoyable, and that I want to share. I want to show-and-tell others about my knowledge to see if they will enjoy it too. This is the fundamental purpose behind a philatelic exhibit. What it costs, the awards, all that stuff, is fluff.

OK, what kind of material might I show to deliver my story? A few thoughts for consideration (refer to Tip Sheet B):

- show one example of each print (unused mounted complete sets (airmails, dues, definitive issues, commemoratives? Pick one.))
- preproduction material (very expensive and sometimes hard to obtain)
- a sheet or multiples showing sheet imprints
- constant varieties and major plate flaws
- CDS cancels on at least one value from each of the primary post offices (dream on)
- a map showing sea routes taken by the ships from each nation represented on the stamps
- covers with all applicable rates for various services (including unique markings)

Now our story is really taking shape. By identifying the material to exhibit we are *refining* scope. With a little more polish, we might land on a story about print production, or sea routes to Jamaica. If you like print production, you might consider perforation variations, watermarks, transfer varieties, color differences, essays, proofs, and much, much more.

Oh, here's something... what about Confederate blockade runners during the American Civil War. I believe the C.S.S. Alabama frequented those waters as part of its route to France for repairs and war supplies.

If you change your theme, conduct more research to determine if there is enough material available and affordable to support the new idea. Changing your mind is part of the fun, not the frustration, but keep it simple. Most who enjoy viewing exhibits spend only a few minutes studying your work (if you are lucky) before visiting another exhibit. So where can I get more ideas? If you are not a member of APS and AAPE, become one. The APRL (the APS

library) is fantastic. For a small fee you can ask them to photocopy information to send you, or send you books on loan. Don't know what to ask for? Not a problem. The librarians will help you discover useful material while you talk to them on the telephone. Here are some out-of-print booklets you may want to check out and read (copies of both can be found on your Reference CD):

- Philatelic Exhibiting, by Roy A. Dehn [Stanley Gibbons]
- How to Arrange and Write-up a Stamp Collection, by Stanley Phillips [Stanley Gibbons]

These booklets were written before personal computers were invented. They still offer useful ideas for exhibitors; those who prepare exhibits manually and those who do it electronically.

Remember this: You need to develop a “hook” to lure... then snag your audience while impressing them by delivering meaningful knowledge. In saying that, let's look at the next workshop's topic, the ultimate “hook,” write-up and page design.

### What do you get from all of this?

- a) Education. You evolve beyond the “stick ‘em” in the empty square syndrome.
- b) You grow with each step taken to enhance your knowledge.
- c) You become the expert in your chosen field of interest.
- d) You become accomplished with every medal awarded. A word of good advice: do not allow medals to drive your exhibiting interests. During your exhibiting experiences, you will have occasions of extreme joy and others filled with disappointment. Let the anger associated with disappointment quickly dissipate! There will always be another show.
- e) Understand the “Challenge Factor” – based on a show's ranking, a gold medal at one show may not guarantee a gold medal at your next show. Exhibits are building blocks. On the average, a club exhibit may offer to 12 to 50 frames with local judges or club member voting. A regional show (Omaha, OKPEX) have 75 to 100+ frames, is WSP certified by APS, supported with accredited judges. National shows (St. Louis Stamp Expo, CHICAGOPEX) can host 150 to 400+ frames, and International Shows (STAMPEx in London) are another level of competition and complexities.
- f) Doors open to new interest. New friends appear out of thin air. You evolve into a new understanding of “having fun”.

**Class Study Aids, References and Resources:**

- a) The MPS Club Exhibiting Reference CD – wow!
  - Sample Exhibits
  - Manual of Philatelic Judging
  - Out of print exhibiting documents
  - Zwillingger's "Exhibiting Tips" from "The American Stamp Dealer & Collector" magazine, compliments of Randy Neil
- b) Tip Sheet A – Title Page Fundamentals
- c) Tip Sheet B – Elements of an Exhibit
- d) The New Philatelic Exhibitors Handbook, by Randy L. Neil (purchase at our exhibiting workshops for \$22.50 – only a few original copies available)

**Today's Guest Speaker:**

Randy L. Neil – Fundamentals of the Title Page, Part I

**Homework Assignment:**

- Familiarize yourself with the Reference CD. Those without a computer will receive hardcopy printouts of some portion of the contents during our workshops.
- Bring the material you plan to exhibit to the next workshop for open discussion.
- Build your first DRAFT Title Page and bring it to the next workshop. This can be a sketch of your roadmap showing the major elements discussed by Randy Neil.