

## EXHIBIT STYLE GUIDE TEMPLATE

*This template offers a starting point for creating a style guide for your museum.*

*Add sections that would benefit or cut sections if they don't pertain to your work.*



### SECTION 1 | Introduction

Explain the overall approach and aims of your style guide. Provide any background about your museum (its history, mission, plans) that would be helpful for someone using the style guide. This doesn't need to be long.

### SECTION 2 | Voice and Tone

Define the voice and tone of your exhibit labels. Think about them in terms of the kind of relationship your museum wants to have with visitors.

- Voice is the personality of your museum manifest in your exhibits.
- Tone is the attitude or mood within that personality (e.g. dark humor vs silly humor).
  - Tone is likely to shift depending on the exhibit. You may wish to identify elements of tone that you want to be sure to avoid or that should always be present.

### SECTION 3 | Usage

- List the style references you'll use to address basic usage/grammar questions (e.g., dictionary, style manual).
- Specific usages
  - Dates
  - Capitalization
  - Numbers (when to spell them out)
  - Words to avoid and why
  - Common terms with multiple spellings
  - Introducing scientific terms, foreign language, or unusual words
  - Pronunciation keys
  - Reading level
  - Statement about how you'll use jargon, culture-specific references, and humor
  - Reading level

### SECTION 4 | Label Hierarchy *(see attached example from NHMU)*

- Introduction (optional)
  - Provide an overview of the structure and goals of your label hierarchy. Include any background that will be helpful for style guide users.
- Define the types of labels in your label hierarchy. *(You may wish to use NHMU's attached example as a model.)*
  - For each label type, specify purpose, components, and word count.

### SECTION 5 | Graphic Standards

- Introduction (optional)
  - Provide an overview of the goals of your graphic standards (e.g., legibility!). Include any background that will be helpful for style guide users.
- Fonts
  - Specify types, number allowed, guidelines for bold and italics
- Label and font colors
  - Provide guidelines for selecting label and font colors that maximize legibility.
- Panel sizes
  - You could provide guidelines for specific sizes or relative sizes (e.g., the exhibit intro panel will always be the largest).
- Accessibility
  - Identify the resources you'll consult to ensure your graphic standards and their implementation meet accessibility best practices. *(See attached example from Museum of Science.)*

## EXHIBITION LABEL HIERARCHY

*This handout is based on the label hierarchy at the Natural History Museum of Utah developed in 2008 by Becky Menlove. Thanks to Becky for graciously sharing it with StEPS-UT.*

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### Exhibition Title

Title of the exhibition. May be accompanied by a quote, question, or surprising fact.

- The purpose of this text is to “grab visitors by the arm” and welcome them into the exhibition.
- Selection and/or composition of these elements should result in short, pithy, resonant, inspiring, provocative or startling prose that provides insight to the experience of the exhibition and grows directly from its Big Idea.

### Exhibition Introduction

A panel located on the title wall or adjacent surface will explain what you are seeing and doing in the moment – at the title wall – and what you’ll see and do in the gallery.

- Subhead plus text block(s) of two (or three) paragraphs at 5-7 line with 40-55 characters per line (total word count: 50-75).
- Text embodies Big Idea.

### Section (or Subtheme) Introduction

These panels help to orient visitors to distinct content areas made up of a grouping of exhibits related by thematic focus or experiential approach within the larger exhibition. They tell visitors what they will see or do in a particular area and explain why a particular set of objects, displays, and activities have been grouped together. Section intros should include, where appropriate, uniquely Utah references.

- Section title, subhead, and text block of 1-2 paragraphs at 4-6 lines with 40-55 characters per line (total word count: 40-60)
- Text embodies individual Supporting Concept or Subtheme

### Mindset Panel

These labels interpret an individual exhibit – subject area, showcase, diorama or other arrangement of objects – in depth. They intrigue visitors, encourage them to look more closely, make comparison, discover and discuss. For example in an exhibit about cells, visitors might be inspired to think about themselves a single celled organism that has grown as large as an elephant – what would the consequences be?

- Title, thought-provoking question or statement and text block of 1-3 paragraphs at 5-7 lines with 40-50 characters per line (total word count: 60-75)

### Focus Panel

Focus panels invite visitors to dig more deeply, look more closely, and learn more about particular groupings or objects within an individual exhibit. This is where “studiers” or diligent visitors can find more, and more complex, information. It is critical that focus labels remain focused. Don’t succumb to the urge to tell everything there is to know, or even the studiers won’t read these labels. A clearly composed subhead should lead the way to a focused block of text.

Focus panels should connect directly to what is on display and should guide visitors to look at specific objects or features.

- Subhead, one paragraph of 5-7 lines with 40-50 characters per line (total word count: 50-60). A photograph, diagram, or illustration will often accompany a focus panel to further expand on the topic. These graphic elements will include captions. Rail focus panels will have line lengths of up to 60 characters.

### ID Labels

Identification of objects and artifacts on display is essential for a collecting institution such as NHMU. ID labels must be legible, consistent, and clearly related to the objects they identify. Group IDs will be used to identify groups of like objects.

Extended IDs will identify specific individual objects and will include 1-3 sentences to explain a particular feature, help visitors make connections, or link the object to specific Utah places.

***Archaeology collections:***

Object name (Bowl; Basket), date (AD 500; circa 200 BC) Descriptive name (Mancos black on white; Plaited; Twined; etc.)  
Cultural affiliation (Anasazi; Virgin Anasazi; Kayenta Anasazi; Fremont; Paleo-archaic; archaic)  
Location collected (site name and/or county name)  
Collected by (individual or expedition), date collected (with as much specificity as is known, e.g. January 5, 1956; March 1980; 1980; 1980s) Materials (listed with leading capital, no period, e.g., Native clay, basalt temper, mineral slip; Yucca, sp.; Sumac [*Rhus trilobata*])  
Object-unique NHMU identification number

***Ethnographic collections:***

Object name (Moccasins; Yeibechai Doll; Two Grey Hills Rug) Artist if known (Ken Williams), Date (2005; circa 1900; 1890s) Tribal affiliation (Ute; Goshute, Ute, Paiute; Navajo)  
Materials (listed with leading capital letter, no period, e.g., Buckskin, glass beads, sinew)  
Credit line (e.g., Gift of...; On loan from ...; Purchased by NHMU Collectors Council; Tony Taylor Collection; Four Corners Collection; etc.)  
Object-unique NHMU identification number

***Paleontology collections:***

Common Name and specific fossil title (Tyrannosaurus rex leg bone [femur], Tyrannosaur leg bone [femur])  
Latin name, if different (Tyrannosaur sp.)  
Location collected  
Collected by (individual or expedition), date collected (as much specificity as available, e.g, January 5, 1909; March 1950; 2001)  
Object-unique NHMU identification number

***Biological collections (botany, vertebrates, malacology, entomology):***

Common Name  
Latin name (ital; genus capital, species lowercase)  
Location collected (San Juan County, Utah; Utah; Twin Peaks, Wasatch Mountains, Utah, etc.)  
Collected by (individual or expedition), date collected (according to provenience, e.g, January 5, 1909; March 1950; 2001; circa 1900; 1940s)  
Object-unique NHMU identification number

***Minerals:***

Mineral name and (chemical composition)  
Location collected (e.g., Brazil; Wildcat Mine, Park City, etc.; provide as much information as is available in collections records)  
Collected by/Gift of (Credit line; in whatever format has been defined for collection) and date collected where available  
Object-unique NHMU identification number

Example:

Orpiment ( $\text{As}_2\text{S}_3$ )  
Newmont Mine, Nevada  
Gift of Newmont Mining Company, 2004 NHMU.MC.11111999

## **Photo Captions and Credits**

Visitors are more likely to read photos captions than many other elements of an exhibition. Make them count! Photo captions need to stand on their own even if a visitor hasn't read many other elements of the exhibit. They should give insight into the image and connect it to the themes of the exhibition.

- 20 - 35 words plus photo credit if needed.
- Photo credits should read "Photo: Photographer, Source" or "Photo: Photographer © NHMU"

## **Activity Prompt (what you're doing, why, how)**

These custom labels provide an invitation to engage with an interactive exhibit. They will provide context, set expectations and provide guiding questions as appropriate. Additionally, these labels will include clear and succinct instructions about how to participate (e.g., "to see how ponds filter water, turn the wheel").

Activity prompts will be the last labels to be written. Their development will follow initial prototype testing with audiences and functional testing with fabricators. First drafts of activity prompts for NHMU custom designed interactives will be developed in-house and tested along with physical components of the exhibit. Writer will work closely with interactive developer to draft final prompt copy. Label length and placement must be determined before final design phase is complete.

Some exhibit components noted as "interactive" in exhibition plans, such as touch specimens, microscopes, and magnifiers, will require simple and standardized instructions of 10-15 words each.

## **Quotes/Questions/Headlines**

Short quotations will be incorporated throughout the exhibits and may appear as stand-alone text, headlines and subheads. The primary purpose of quotations is to bring diverse Utah voices to the exhibition experience and to mix humanist and artistic perspectives with those of science. These will be selected from a broad range of sources and should provoke, intrigue and engage visitors as they move through the exhibit spaces.

- Quotation length of one or two sentences followed by the author's name and who they are (e.g., Utah author, Third generation Utah rancher, etc.)

## **Spotlight Panel**

First person accounts, experiences, anecdotes and stories attributed to specific individuals. These panels are an extra treat for diligent visitors and potentially an alternate entry point for folks who might find personal narratives more resonant. Story panels aim to capture a particularity of voice, a unique experience or point of view – a great story. To make these work, they must be focused on a singular idea and must remain within 50-70 words.

...

## **A Word about Subheads**

Subheads appear on many label types. They are essential for both capturing the readers' attention and summarizing what the label is about, and they are a good place to bring the story's focus back to Utah.

Subheads should provide enough information for individuals who are acting as interpreters to be confident in explaining what the label is about without reading the entire label aloud. Likewise, for skimmers and skaters (streakers and strollers), the subhead may be the only source of information consumed. Make the words count. A subhead is most effective when it is a complete clause (a sentence with a subject and a verb) and when it is succinct. A one-line (40-50 character) subhead is best; a two-line subhead can work; any more words, and it's no longer a subhead, but a paragraph instead.

The sentences that constitute subheads on exhibit labels do not end in periods and are set in bold type; question marks and exclamation points are used when appropriate. But, use exclamation points sparingly, and never as a replacement for exciting word choice and sentence structure! Always use an initial capital only – a subhead shouldn't be all caps.

# Universal Design

## Quick Reference Guidelines

### Graphic Design

**Minimum size body text**  
(exceptions for small ID labels)  
*Recommendation*  
22pt body text

**Ideal size for body text**  
*Recommendation*  
28–32 pt body text

**Contrast for body text**  
(under 36 pt)  
*Recommendation*

Between  
70% and 95% or 70% and 95%

**Typeface choice for body text**  
*Recommendation*

Use simple sans serif  
and serif typefaces

Don't use these styles:

*Script*

*Handwriting*  
**STENCIL**

(exceptions for titles made  
on a case by case basis)

**Type styles for body text**  
*Recommendation*

Do not use ALL CAPS

Do not use **bold**

Use *italics* sparingly

**Line length and leading**  
*Recommendation*

Line length: 45–55 characters

The ideal line length is about this many characters

Leading should be at least 120% of type size

120%

**Hyphenation**  
*Recommendation*

No hyphenation  
of words

### Physical Design

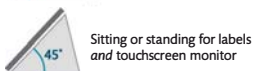
**Slant surface angles**  
*Recommendation*



Sitting with button interface



Standing for viewing labels and table-top monitor

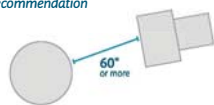


Sitting or standing for labels and touchscreen monitor

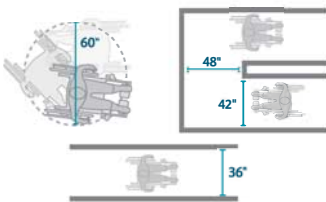
**Stool height**  
*Recommendation*



**Circulation between free-standing components**  
*Recommendation*



**Wheelchair clearance**  
*minimum measurements*



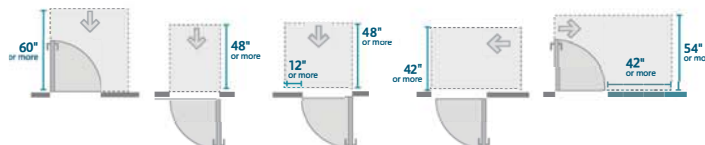
**Flooring transitions – options**  
*maximum measurements*



**Ramps**

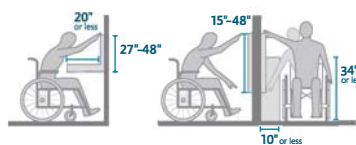


**Door clearance – options**

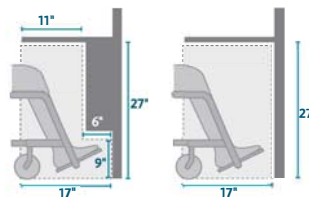


**Reach**

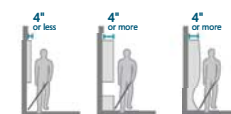
When possible minimize reach distance to 11"



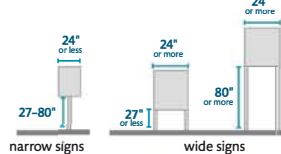
**Wheelchair pull under – options**  
*minimum measurements*



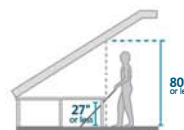
**Protruding objects – options**



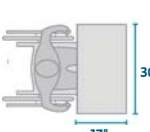
**Free-standing signs – options**



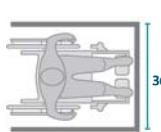
**Head clearance**



**Pull under**  
*minimum*



**Pull in**  
*minimum*



Maximum height  
for wall text 70"  
(except large titles)

66"

60"

Ideal range  
for wall text  
48"–67"

Center line  
for wall text

54"

48"

Minimum height  
for wall text: 42"  
(does not apply  
for slant labels)

42"

Range for reach

This shaded area is to scale

Maximum reach distance is 20" but 11" is recommended

6"

12"

Table top

bottom of table-top height 27"

Minimum pull-under  
distance for wheelchairs: 17"  
(see wheelchair pull under for details)

Download full size poster at  
<https://www.mos.org/sites/dev-elvis.mos.org/files/docs/misc/UD%20poster.pdf>

Produced by



Unless marked as recommendations, all listed legal requirements  
are taken from the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design

Please hang this poster 4" from the floor

 INSTITUTE of  
Museum and Library  
SERVICES  
This project was supported in part by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

36"

30"

24"

18"

12"

6"

6"