The J. Paul Getty Museum

QUICK GUIDE TO ADULT AUDIENCE INTERPRETIVE MATERIALS: GALLERY TEXTS AND GRAPHICS
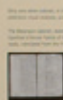
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See the *Complete Guide to Adult Audience Interpretive Materials* for more detailed information about the topics outlined here.

Get the *Guide to Adult Audience Interpretive Materials* online:
http://go.getty.edu/forms_tools/forms/museum/aaim_completeguide.pdf
http://go.getty.edu/forms_tools/forms/museum/aaim_quickguide.pdf

OVERVIEW

This guide outlines the various types of texts and graphics offered to adult visitors to the J. Paul Getty Museum at both the Getty Center and the Getty Villa. It addresses audience, approach, style, and content for the full array of interpretive materials to help curators and other authors prepare appropriate and engaging gallery texts and graphics for the permanent collections and exhibitions (including permanent collection rotations). The guidelines also include descriptions of and design specifications for each element. It offers ideas, suggestions, goals, and tips for preparing interpretive materials.

CONCEPT

For our wide spectrum of visitors, the Getty provides information in a variety of formats to accommodate different learning styles (including GettyGuide™, Web presentations, gallery talks, active learning spaces in the Sketching Gallery at the Getty Center and the TimeScape Room at the Getty Villa, etc.). This guide focuses specifically on in-gallery texts and graphics.

Our goal is to capitalize on the strengths of each interpretive element to communicate different types of information. For example, some components are best suited to present information that is contextual or analytical (introductory statements) or to help visitors focus on what can be seen in an individual work of art (object labels). Others foster learning in a more experiential manner by breaking down information into smaller units (such as section and focus texts and gallery cards). We make decisions to repeat some information across media so that key points are emphasized. These materials work in tandem with the Getty's in-gallery media and online presentations.

The primacy of the art is at the forefront of all gallery presentations. Judicious use of a variety of interpretive elements helps to guide the visitor's experience of the art. Taken together, our materials should:

- foster curiosity about the objects on display
- provide guidance for looking closely and seeing critically
- help visitors access information that increases understanding
- offer a more meaningful experience in front of a work of art

AUDIENCE

The majority of the Getty's visitors are curious, college-educated, nonspecialist adults. To reach this target audience, think about the patterns visitors exhibit as they look at art. They:

- are motivated to learn
- have limited time
- have their own priorities and organizational approach to taking in information and navigating space
- may be overwhelmed or put off by too much information or specialized art terminology
- are often visiting the Museum as a social outing

APPROACH

Organize interpretive materials hierarchically, first establishing the logic, context, and themes of the gallery installation and revealing relationships among the objects, then moving to specifics regarding individual works of art. Here are some important points to assist in writing:

- Identify the unifying theme or idea for each gallery. Layer information supporting that idea from general to specific—from gallery title, to introductory statement, to section and focus texts, to individual object labels (see At-a-Glance Outline, pg 6).
- Regardless of sequence or adjacencies, individual elements such as object labels should be able to stand on their own, offering information and strategies for looking closely as well as reinforcing the themes of the gallery.
- The hierarchy for interpretive materials should be consistent throughout the Museum to build on visitor expectations about where and how to learn more.

While no single component can provide all possible answers, gallery materials should generally address the questions the visitor may have, such as:

- "What is it?"
- "Why is it here, and why should I care?"
- "What is the story or symbolism?"
- "How was it made?"
- "How was it used?"
- "What can I discover by looking more carefully?"

STYLE

Use a tone that is appropriate to the project's goals and engages visitors.

- Write to encourage looking and thinking, to foster a sense of discovery.
- Be crisp, clear, and concise (see the At-a-Glance Outline [pg 6] for word counts for individual types of interpretive materials).
- Use strong verbs and an active voice.
- Consider visual cues and other techniques to enliven text blocks: headings, subheadings, time lines, and didactics with strong visual components, such as images, diagrams, and maps.
- When writing about artists at work, use past tense; for works of art, use present tense.
- Avoid large or infrequently used words, and make an effort to define specialized terminology (i.e., foreshortening, linear perspective).
- When foreign terms are used, define them, and translate foreign titles (if this is not possible, use the foreign title first, followed by the English translation in parentheses). For subsequent mentions, use English.

CONTENT

Consider these strategies when preparing texts:

- Focus on conveying no more than one to three ideas.
- For object labels, begin by identifying concrete visual details to assist viewers in guided looking.
- Avoid unsupported, qualitative judgments such as "The artist is the greatest of his time" or a particular work of art "is the finest example of its type."
- When appropriate, make a connection between the historic object and a contemporary context (i.e., a *cartonnier* is "like a modern filing cabinet").
- If possible, include quotations by artists or contemporaries to provide a firsthand voice.
- When relevant, provide information about the technical process involved in the creation of a work of art.
- When making comparisons, the comparative work should be close by or reproduced on the label.
- Sometimes tombstone information is enough—not all objects require additional text.

Examples of interpretive materials are included in the *Complete Guide to Adult Audience Interpretive Materials,* beginning on pg 9. For other aspects of style and content, refer to the Getty Editorial Style Guide, available online at http://wiki.getty.edu/confluence/display/WEB EDUSGUIDE/Main+Page. Note that additional samples of previous exhibitions and installations are available by request from Design and Collection Information & Access Editorial.

AT-A-GLANCE OUTLINE

Gallery interpretive materials, including titles, texts, and graphics, are driven by the goals and context of each installation.

INTERPRETIVE ELEMENTS

BRANDING TITLE
- States main concept, often illustrated with iconic objects
- Word count: approx. 30 characters

EXHIBITION TITLE / GALLERY NAME AND NUMBER
- Serving as both on-site orientation and promotion, the exhibition/installation title appears in Center common spaces, including Orientation Station maps, and at the Villa Entry Pavilion.
- Permanent collection installation titles appear in gallery doorjambs.
- Exhibition galleries read "Changing Exhibitions."
- Thematic, chronological, or geographic focus
- Word count: approx. 30 characters

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT
- States main concept; may include highlight objects
- Word count: 50–200

SECTION, FOCUS, AND DIAGRAMMATIC TEXTS
- Section texts address larger themes and unify groups of objects and, when necessary, divide the installation space into more digestible areas for public viewing and understanding.
- Focus texts provide additional strategies and approaches to directed looking, conservation stories, thematic threads, biographies, and connections among objects.
- On a more intimate scale and scope than section texts, focus texts contextualize a number of objects, sometimes as a case overview.
- Diagrammatic texts provide additional information through maps, time lines, images and illustrations, family trees, etc.
- All of these texts may include comparative illustrations and captions.
- Word count: 200 maximum

OBJECT LABELS
- In general, types of labels include wall labels, group labels, case labels, and pedestal labels.
- Begin with specifics that encourage close looking and proceed to biographical and contextual information, when relevant.
- Present one to three essential points about a particular work of art to foster close looking and understanding.
- Word count: varies, depending on type of label, design, and layout (generally 30–140 words maximum)

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS
- Wall quotes, murals, and captions
- Brochures
- Self-guided activities
- Gallery cards
- Labels for in-gallery video, interactive media, and listening stations

DIAGRAM OF INTERPRETIVE ELEMENTS
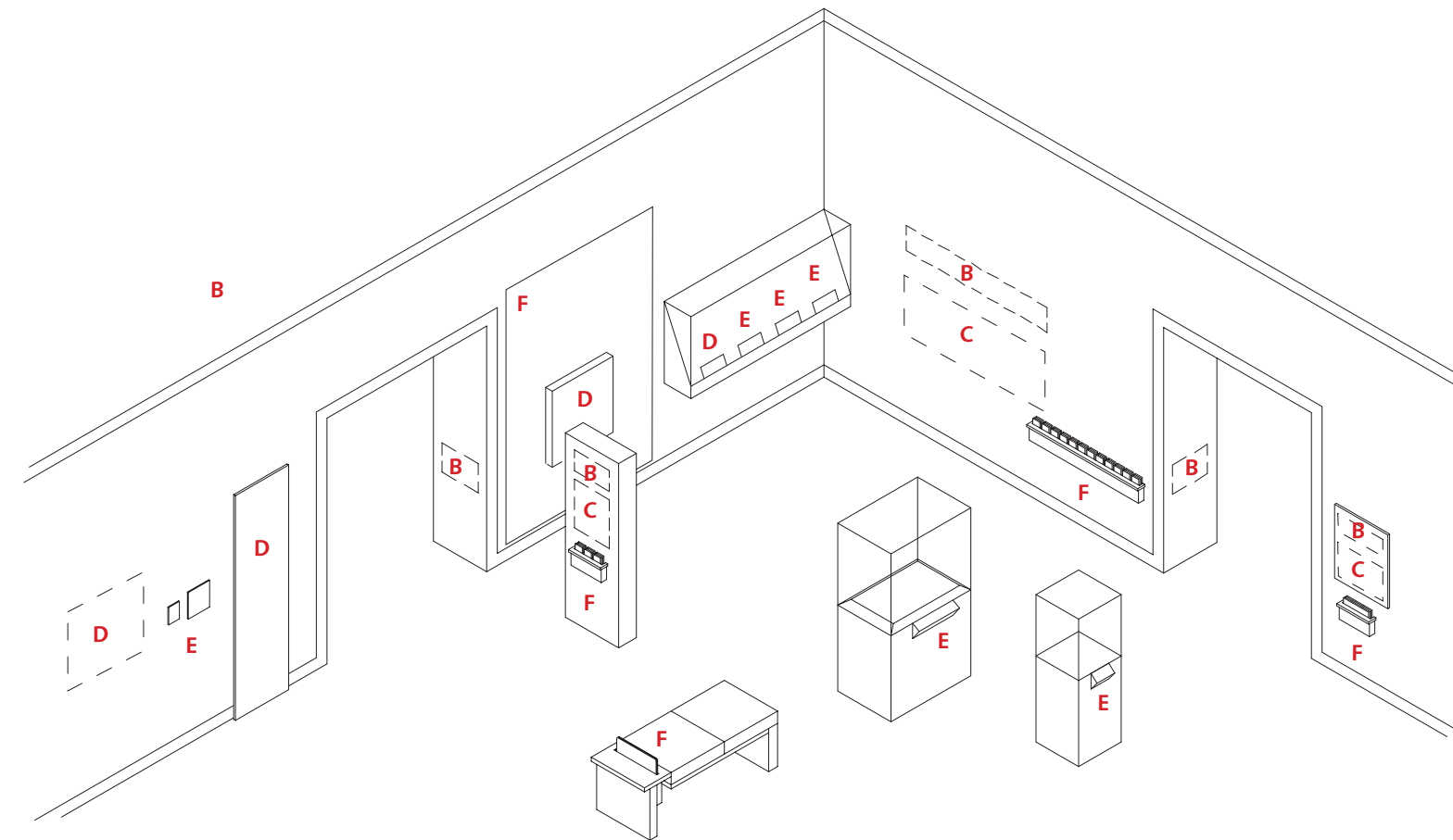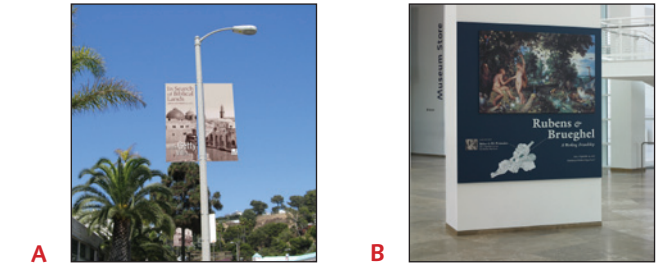
INTERPRETIVE ELEMENTS

A. BRANDING TITLE

B. EXHIBITION TITLE / GALLERY NAME AND NUMBER

C. INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

D. SECTION, FOCUS, AND DIAGRAMMATIC TEXTS

E. OBJECT LABELS

F. SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

To initiate the process for labels and other interpretive materials that are not part of the regular exhibitions program and other major scheduled installations, use this form http://go.getty.edu/forms_tools/forms/museum/label_request.pdf. Production process procedures are included in the *Complete Guide to Adult Audience Interpretive Materials*.

Supplemental information found in the *Complete Guide*:

• Descriptions, Editorial Tips, Specifications, and Samples

• Appendix

      Interpretive Materials Development Process
      Editorial/Design Request Form and Process
      Label Tags (GettyGuide, Recent Acquisitions, etc.)
      Object Not on View
      Museum Policy on Second-Language Didactics
        for Exhibitions
      Suggested Reading and References
      Contact Information

FRONT COVER: *A RENAISSANCE CABINET REDISCOVERED,* NOVEMBER 22, 2005–AUGUST 5, 2007