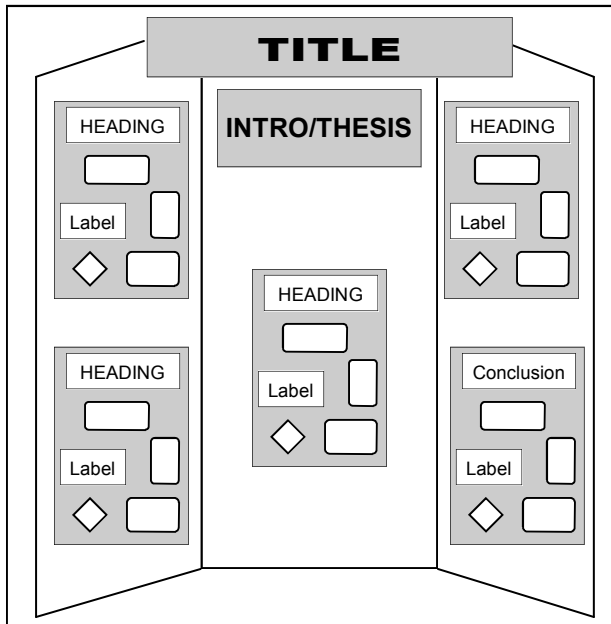


# Exhibit Shapes and Sizes

Exhibits are designed to display visual and written information on a topic in an easy-to-understand and attractive manner. Exhibits are not simply collections of material. They are carefully designed to make an **argument** about your topic. To be successful, an exhibit must create an effective balance between visual interest and historical explanation.



## Three-Panel Display

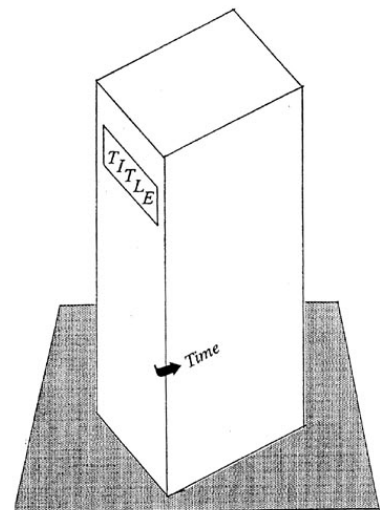
The most common form of an exhibit is a three-panel display, similar to the one on the left. This style is the least complicated to design and build, but is still a very effective way to present your information. Here are some tips for this style:

- Be sure your title is the main focus of the center panel.
- Use the center panel, or in some cases the top left panel, to present your main ideas and argument.
- Use the side panels to provide supporting evidence for your argument.
- Divide the exhibit into sections to give it an organizational structure that makes sense to the viewer.
- If your topic is presented chronologically, make sure the sequence works visually on the panels.
- You have a limited number of words; use them sparingly and let the quotations, documents, artifacts, drawings, and photographs demonstrate your thesis.
- Artifacts or other materials may also be placed on the table between the side panels, but remember that it should be directly related to the topic and necessary to support your argument.

## Three-Dimensional Exhibit

A three-dimensional exhibit is more complicated to construct, but can be especially effective for explaining topics where change over time is important. Since you have four main panels, it also works well for projects that have four natural sections. Like the three-panel display, one side should contain your title and main theme. As you move around the exhibit, the development of your topic can be explored. It is not necessary for the project itself to be able to spin. You may set it on a table (or the floor) so people can walk around it.

When making a three-dimensional exhibit, good organization is especially important. Because your exhibit has so many sides, viewers may be more easily confused about how to follow your exhibit's narrative. Make sure that each side is clearly labeled, cleanly organized, and that there is a logical flow of ideas as the viewer moves about your exhibit.



This is just a start to the creative ways that History Fair students have expressed their arguments in the exhibit category. Think about ways to connect the content of your project with the look of your exhibit. The only limit is your imagination and ability to transport your project to a competition!

# A Closer Look at History Fair Exhibits

A good design doesn't just jazz up your exhibit; it helps express your ideas. Can you guess what this exhibit is about without even reading the text? The cut-out of Rosie the Riveter lets the viewer immediately know the project's topic. The student took the theme a step further by using a red, white, and blue color scheme to convey the patriotic aspects of her topic.

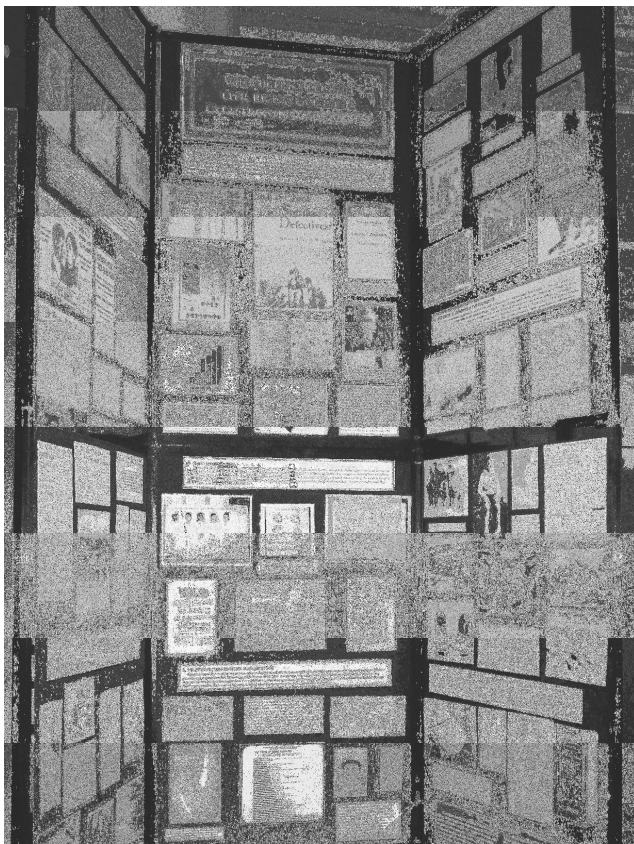
History Fair isn't about glitz. The student has a simple, effective design for a project with a clear argument and solid research.



History Fair exhibits come in all shapes and sizes, but there are several common characteristics you can see in many good exhibits. Check out these exhibits from other students!

The thesis and main argument are very clear to the viewer in this project. The student used a larger font and a bold border to immediately attract your attention.

Photographs, newspapers, and sheet music are just a few of the primary sources that the student was able to incorporate into the project to support her argument.



The student arranged the exhibit into logical, well organized sections with a wide variety of primary sources.



Even non-traditional formats must make an argument and use evidence.

This project was about one student's immigrant ancestor's journey to their new lives in Chicago. To symbolize the project's connection to immigration, the students used an old suitcase as the frame for their exhibit.

# Tips for Creating a Spectacular Exhibit

## Planning

### Getting Started

After your research, make an outline for your exhibit—just like you would before you write a paper. Make sure to include the main arguments and points that you would like to make in the exhibit. Using this outline, you'll be able to see what the main sections of your exhibit need to be in order to support your argument and convey it to the viewer.



### Plan It Out

Plan out your exhibit with a simple sketch before you start to create the full-scale project. Do not touch a glue stick until you have a plan on paper!

### Connect Content to Design

Let the topic of your project inspire the design of your exhibit. What visual cues can you send the viewer to convey symbolically the main message of your project? This can be as simple as using appropriate colors. A project about women's suffrage, for example, would be striking using purple and gold, colors commonly associated with the movement. Students have also created projects about conservation that looked like trees, projects about education reform that looked like school houses, and exhibits about suffrage that looked like a voting booth. No matter what you decide, remember that your project doesn't have to be fancy to be effective.

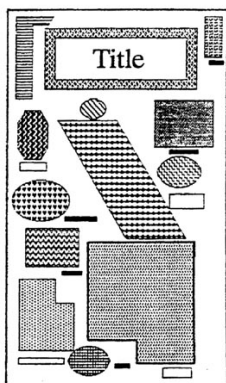
### Divide and Conquer

Following the outline of your major argument and main points, lay out the other supporting evidence you have for your ideas. What sections will need in the exhibit to tell the story and explain your argument persuasively? Background? Significance? Historical Context? Outcomes? Theme? Also, remember that exhibits rely on a visual argument as much as the text on the display. Which photographs, charts, maps, or other visuals provide the strongest support for your ideas? What primary source quotes enhance your argument? What areas might need more visual evidence to balance out the exhibit?

### What's Your Point?

No matter what type of exhibit you decide to create, what topic you choose, or what division you are in, it is important to make sure that your argument (thesis) is clear **in the project itself**. Your argument should be the first thing the viewer looks at so they know right away what you are trying to prove in your exhibit. It should be concise and well-written. Usually students do this by making sure the argument is located where the viewers' eyes will look first, usually in the center in a larger font.

## Putting It All Together



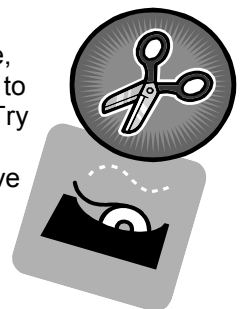
*A cluttered exhibit can leave your viewers feeling overwhelmed and unsure about the argument you are trying to make.*

### Avoid Clutter

It is always tempting to try to get as much on your exhibit panels as possible, but this usually makes for a cluttered and confusing display. You don't have to put every single photo, drawing, and map that you found onto your exhibit. Try to select only the most important items for your project boards. Clarity and organization are most important goals for this project. Everything should have a reason for being on your exhibit.

### Content is More Important Than Glitz

Fancy exhibits are nice to look at and can be a lot of fun to create—but remember that your historical argument is the most important part of your exhibit.



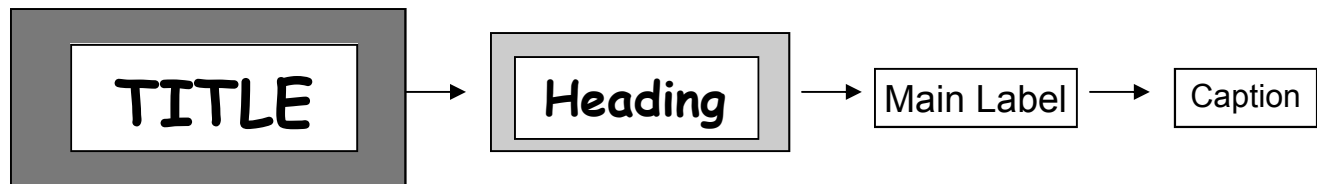
## A Note on the Quote

Quotations can be an effective way of using historical evidence to support your argument. Sometimes, a quote from the historical figure just says it more convincingly than you could say it yourself.

However, using too many quotations can easily make your exhibit cluttered and overwhelming for the viewer. The important aspects of your History Fair project—your argument, analysis, and interpretation—should stand out. It is important, therefore, to make sure that there is a reason for everything you put up on your exhibit and that it is well organized.

## Labels

Once you've divided up your information into sections, you should make sure to label those sections. The labels you use for your title and main ideas are important because they direct the viewer's attention through your project. Remember: **Big Idea = Big Font**. You will want to put your title in the largest font on your exhibit and then scale the rest of your fonts down according to their importance. Even for your smallest labels and captions, however, make sure to use a font that is easily readable from the vantage point of your viewer.



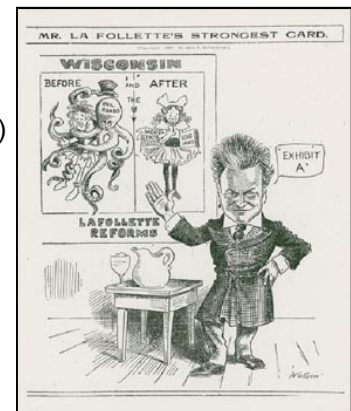
One way to make your labels stand out is to have the writing on a lightly colored piece of paper with a darker background or matting behind it. This can be done with construction paper, tag board, or mat board. Dark black lettering makes your labels easier to read. Photographs and written materials will also stand out more on backgrounds.

## Labels and Captions

Labels help to develop your interpretation. They are the link between your thesis and the evidence you are using to support it. Spend some time thinking carefully about your labels. Labels (and smaller descriptive captions for individual sources) should explain the connection to your thesis rather than just point out what is in the image.

Which of the following captions do *you* think would work best with the political cartoon on the right about former Wisconsin Governor Robert La Follette? Why?

- A. Political Cartoon about Governor La Follette
- B. Governor La Follette's supporters championed his reforms as beneficial for citizens of the state.



## Keep it Neat

You've spent a lot of energy researching and creating your exhibit. Take the time to give it some extra polish. Make sure you've checked your spelling and grammar. Use your best handwriting or print text using a computer. Make sure you've cut and glued things to your exhibit board as neatly as possible.

## Look It Over

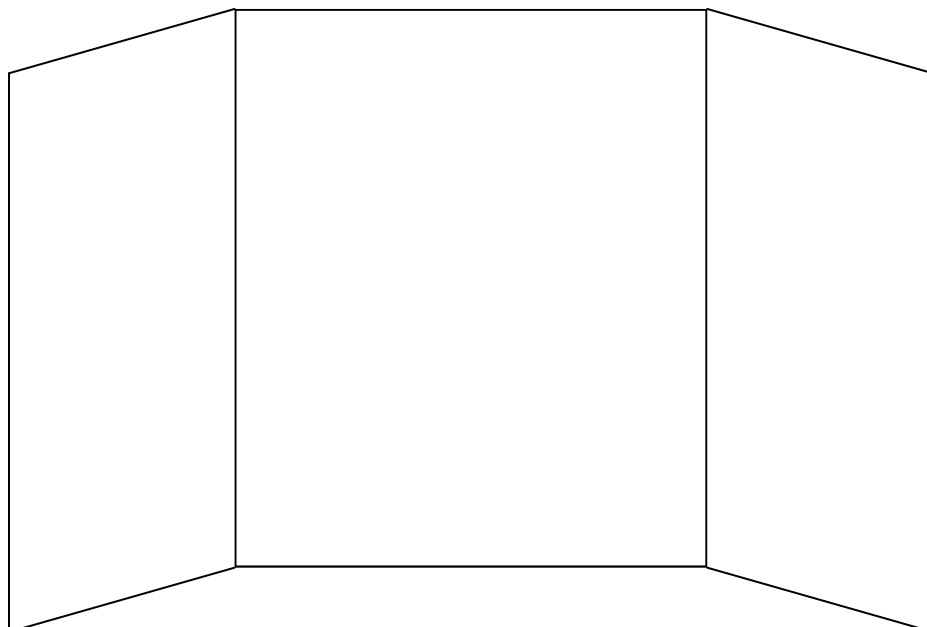


### The Exhibit Stands Alone

When evaluating History Fair exhibits, judges should be able to find all the information about your topic in your exhibit itself. *The exhibit has to stand on its own*. Have someone who has never seen your exhibit look at it (a friend, teacher, neighbor, etc). Without saying anything, let them read through the entire exhibit. Then, ask them a few questions to see if you have communicated your argument clearly: What am I trying to prove in my exhibit? What evidence have I shown to support that argument? What do you like about my exhibit? What is confusing to you?

# History Fair Exhibit Planning

Title:	
Thesis:	
Connection to Theme (Optional):	
Design and Color Ideas:	
Main ideas that support my thesis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>	Main sections to organize my exhibit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>
Possible illustrations to use:	



# What are the Qualities of a Good Exhibit?

As you create your exhibit, go through this list and ask yourself if you've met all the criteria for a good History Fair project. Judges will use these criteria to evaluate your project.



## **Historical Knowledge—35% Junior Division (gr. 6-8); 30% Senior Division (gr. 9-12)**

- ☐ **My exhibit is historically accurate:** All the information in my project is true to the best of my knowledge.
- ☐ **My exhibit demonstrates thorough, balanced, relevant knowledge:** I have made an effort to fully explain my topic and show different perspectives.
- ☐ **I place my topic in historical context:** My topic didn't take place in isolation. I made sure to place my topic into historical context – the intellectual, political, social, and cultural setting for my topic.



## **Historical Analysis—25% Junior Division (gr. 6-8); 30% Senior Division (gr. 9-12)**

- ☐ **My project offers a historical interpretation/argument that is supported by evidence:** I present a thesis in my project and back it up with information drawn from my research.
- ☐ **I have demonstrated historical significance and impact:** My project offers an answer to the “so what?” question. I explain why it is important to know about these events in history.
- ☐ **I have shown change over time and cause and effect:** My exhibit offers an explanation of what things changed over time and why the changes took place.



## **Relation to National History Day Theme - *Optional***

*The National History Day theme is optional in Illinois. If you choose to use the theme, it should be integrated into the analysis presented in your project. Consider using the theme in your thesis so that it is threaded throughout your project.*



## **Sources—20%**

- ☐ **My project uses a depth and range of available primary sources:** I consulted a wide variety of sources from the time period for my project (newspaper accounts, diary entries, photographs, archival accounts, and other first-hand accounts).
- ☐ **My project uses a depth and range of secondary sources:** I used accounts written by historians and other experts to understand the issues involved in my topic and their long-range significance.
- ☐ **I make effective use of sources and quotes in my exhibit:** Sources are used as evidence for points made in my exhibit.



## **Clarity of Presentation—20%**

- ☐ **My exhibit tells a coherent, well-organized story:** I made sure my exhibit is well-organized, easy to understand, and interesting. My exhibit has a natural flow that makes sense to the viewer.
- ☐ **I used the exhibit medium effectively:** My exhibit relies on visuals and concise interpretive text to tell the story. Sections are easily identifiable and move the story along. Words and images are easy to see and read.
- ☐ **My exhibit and written materials show attention to detail and make an impact:** My words and quotes are carefully written and selected. I have proofread and edited my exhibit text, Summary Statement Form, and annotated bibliography.

***Special thanks to Sarah Aschbrenner, National History Day in Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin Historical Society for permission to adapt the Wisconsin NHD Category Guides. Original version: August 2009. Updated October 2010: Chicago Metro History Education Center.***