

Have lasting fun: how to create an exhibit and enter it into a show

By Janet Klug

Have you ever attended a stamp show and spent time looking at the exhibits and wondered how they got there, who they belonged to and how they were created.



Figure 1. A page from the author's British Commonwealth Occupation Force exhibit showing stamps, blocks and covers.

The first time I ever looked at an exhibit was at a show in 1975. I was just resuming my collecting activities that had been dormant during my teenage years and early 20s.

When I got to the show, I had to walk past several frames full of exhibits to get to the dealers.

One exhibit really grabbed my attention. I was enthralled.

A couple of years later, I began working in earnest on my first exhibit. At first, the problems seemed insurmountable, primarily because I didn't know what I was doing, and I didn't know where to go for help or advice.

I went to other stamp shows and looked at a lot more stamp exhibits. It dawned on me that a stamp exhibit was a story told mainly by using stamps, covers and other philatelic materials. Once I figured that out, I was off and running. It went slowly, but at least it was a start.

I finally got my first exhibit together in 1979 and have been exhibiting ever since. Some of my exhibits are just for fun. Others are to share my excitement, interest and research with the other collectors who view them.

I enjoy the creativity of assembling the materials and the development of the story. It is a learning experience for me.

Creating and showing an exhibit is easier than you might think. If you break it into achievable steps, you can create an exhibit too.

Step One: Pick a subject. What do you like to collect? What is going to hold your interest? Can you find the material you need to tell a complete story about it? Even more importantly, if you can find the material, will it fit your stamp or cover budget?

Subject selection is very important. It is your exhibit, your time and your money, so choose something you love.

Step Two: Plan your exhibit. Go back to the original idea that an exhibit is a story.

Let's say you elect to tell the story of your favorite airmail stamp. That story should tell how the design was planned and executed. It should show any artist renderings and preliminary artwork, items that are sometimes easier to find than you might think.

Your exhibit should answer a number of questions.

Were there unadopted designs?

How was the stamp printed and perforated? Did any varieties occur because of the printing processes involved?

When was the stamp issued? How was it used? What postage rates did it pay?

Making a plan will help you get ready to organize your thoughts and your material.

Step Three: Organize your material. Now that you have the basic outline of the story you want to tell, you should organize your stamps or covers or both to follow your plan.

I use either a stockbook or stock pages for this, and slips of paper or sticky notes to write what I plan to say on each page. I slip the notes in the appropriate places on the stock pages.

It is during this process that you will discover if you have gaps in the material you need to tell the story, or if you have left out part of the story.

Make adjustments as you go along and keep looking for more material that will advance your story. A great deal of the fun involved in exhibiting is the thrill of the hunt for the material to exhibit.



Figure 2. A page from the author's Tonga exhibit that was prepared on a computer using Microsoft Publisher software.

In matching stamps to the story, try to remember the comic books from your youth. Comic books are essentially picture stories. Each frame of the comic advances the story using a great illustration and very few words. It is visually exciting. That is your goal with a philatelic exhibit.

Step Four: Making the pages. The most gratifying part of making an exhibit for me is when I have completed the planning, acquired sufficient philatelic material and begun designing the layout of the pages and mounting the material upon them.

Many exhibitors get tied up in knots over this part, so much so that they procrastinate or quit altogether.

It isn't that difficult. Try to make your pages visually interesting. This can be accomplished by varying the layout and material from page to page and by mixing items on pages.

Figure 1 shows a page from my British Commonwealth Occupation Force exhibit. It shows stamps, blocks and a cover all on one page.

The first consideration should be proper conservation of the materials in your possession.

That means using quality mounts as well as paper that is made of cotton rag fiber, is properly bleached and washed, is adequately buffered to remain neutral, and is free of impurities.

Write-ups look best when done on a computer, but wonderful exhibits have been made using a typewriter or even by writing them out by hand.

I really enjoy using Microsoft Publisher to create exhibit pages, but any word processing program works well.

A page of my Tonga exhibit, done on my computer using Microsoft Publisher, is shown in Figure 2.

Use the software that suits your comfort level.

Step Five: It was fun creating an exhibit, wasn't it? Now that you have an exhibit, it's time to show it off.

I recommend that you start at your local or regional stamp exhibition. Contact the show chairman and ask for a prospectus or an application to exhibit.

The prospectus gives the details of a forthcoming philatelic exhibition and contains information for potential exhibitors.

You will readily find show listings in *Linn's Stamp Events Calendar*, or you can find them on the American Philatelic Society web site at www.stamps.org.

Once you have the prospectus, read it carefully for instructions.

Most shows insist that each page of the exhibit be put into a clear sleeve with a sealed bottom. These are readily available at office supply stores.

When buying page sleeves, make sure the package describes product composition. The best page sleeves are made from the essentially inert polyester film called Melinex (a DuPont product that replaced its Mylar film).

The application or prospectus will tell you where and when to take your exhibit to mount in the frames or where to send it if you can't bring it yourself.

It will also tell you how many pages will fit in each frame. Standard frames hold 16 pages in four rows of four, but some shows use nonstandard frame formats.

The prospectus will also tell you when to pick up your exhibit after the show closes, or ask you how you want your exhibit returned to you. The prospectus also explains exhibiting fees, which run about \$7 to \$15 per frame. Some smaller shows have no fees.

Fees support the show (space rental and honorariums paid to the judges).

Most exhibitions use a panel of accredited and qualified judges to evaluate and rate the exhibits.

Ribbons or medals usually are awarded to exhibits, and many exhibitions will host a judges' critique where you can ask questions on how to improve your exhibit.

Exhibits in the United States are judged by criteria that are found in *The Manual of Philatelic Judging*, which sells for \$12 plus any applicable sales tax or shipping charges. For a copy, write to the American Philatelic Society, 100 Match Factory Place, Bellefonte, PA 16823 or visit the society web site.

Judges are exhibitors and collectors just like you. They want to help you make a better exhibit.

For more information on exhibiting, write to American Association of Philatelic Exhibitors, 13955 30th Ave., Golden, CO 80401.