

GUIDELINES FOR BACKBOARDS

REMEMBER: You will be transporting your project. Try to design your backdrop to fold or disassemble easily. Make large signs detachable with grooves or hook-and-loop tape.

Use the following guidelines to make sure your exhibit board establishes:

- a relationship to the year's theme
- the history of your topic
- the significance your topic has had in history and the impact it has today
- how your topic fits into the wider historical context

REMEMBER: A good exhibit is more than just a collection of objects. It is a way to tell a story by using pictures, labels, photos, maps, graphs, and objects.

1. Your board should be close to the maximum height allowed. (6 feet maximum; 4 feet minimum) The maximum width is 40" and maximum depth is 30". Remember you will display your project in a large room and will be surrounded by other projects. You want to be visible!!
2. Your project should be visually attractive.
3. You should have a plan for your project and that plan should be immediately clear to the judges. You will accomplish this through your use of titles, subtitles, color, arrangement, etc.
4. Assume that the viewer knows nothing about your project and that you are going to TEACH her/him. Assume your viewer has a short attention span and organize your board to attract and hold her/him. Avoid a cluttered and confusing board and let a minimum of material tell the story.
5. Make the title of your project prominent. Be sure you make a CLEAR connection between your project and the year's theme.
6. Information should be presented visually:

- Follow an outline from your research. Making rough sketches of your board on a smaller scale and planning your board in sections can save time and effort.
- You are telling a story. In our culture, we read from left to right, top to bottom. It is best to arrange your board with this in mind. If your project has two sides and a back, divide and organize it into three distinct areas. Use subtitles, labeling, and spacing to accomplish this.
- The human eye usually looks only ahead and down, with little upward motion. Because of this, your main title and subtitles need to be prominent.
- Avoid arranging monotonous rows of things or pictures. Instead, achieve variety by changing size, shape, texture, etc. Compose your display in three dimensions using asymmetrical balance as much as possible.
- Arrange and rearrange items on your board to find the most appealing visual effect for your display. Remember, you want to have an eye-catching focal point in the center of the board.
- Rather than having everything lying flat, have some objects or labels protruding out farther from the board's surface.
- You may group certain items, but DO NOT CROWD the overall surface.
- Avoid having large blocks of written material on your board.
- Avoid unsightly "eye-catchers" like shiny tacks, cracks, rips, tape, etc.

7. There are many styles of type (fonts).

- Pick one that fits your topic (Example: old fashioned lettering for a frontier theme; high tech lettering for an outer space theme).
- Avoid "fancy" lettering that may be hard to read.
- Limit your fonts to two. Use one for all your titles and subtitles and another for all the captions and body copy.
- Keep your type consistent; set all the captions in the same style and size of type, and all the subtitles in the same style and size of type.

- Letters can be bought in the form of "press type" whereby the letters are rubbed onto a surface. A copy machine can vary the type size.
- Stencils can be used.

8. Titles, subtitles, and captions:

- Use the titles and subtitles to "walk" the viewer through the project.
- Labels should be clear, brief, and large enough to be read easily. A good test of readability is to stand about 3-5 feet back from your project and try to read the labels.
- Every visual should have a caption unless it is VERY obvious why an item is used.
- Make sure captions relate the item or person to your topic and to the year's theme. Always keep in mind that you are to show the impact on history.
- Proofread!! And remember the 500-word limit?
- Any quoted material used in labels/captions should be in quotation marks with the source cited.

9. A good exhibit board reflects a MOOD. Limit your colors to two main ones with a possible third accent or highlight color. Think about your background color carefully. Is this a cheerful, serious, sad topic? A viewer walking up to your project should immediately get a "feel" for your exhibit.

10. You do not need to spend a lot of money to present a good project. The more advanced planning you do, the less it can cost. You might save by buying a quantity of something and dividing the cost with others who are working on projects.

- Avoid using black and white copied pictures. If possible, take photos of visuals yourself and have them printed, or take photos of visuals from books or magazines. Items that cannot be cut up can be color copied. Consider cutting pictures into shapes to add interest and variety.

11. Tools are important for mounting and labeling.

- Use rubber cement or spray adhesive. Water-based glues will cause paper to wrinkle.
- Use hook-and-loop tape when appropriate.
- There are many different kinds of two-sided mounting tapes. Be careful not to damage special photographs and objects by using the wrong kind of tape.
- Knife blades used to cut paper, poster board, and cardboard dull quickly. Have plenty of replacements and change the blade often.
- Use a t-square and a triangle to assure corners are 90 degrees.

12. Good places to find a wide variety of materials are craft stores and art supply stores. Materials come in a wide variety of sizes, textures, colors, thicknesses, etc. so ask for assistance when selecting the right items. Avoid using anything that reflects too much light since that can be very distracting.

13. You may want to light your display. Simple and inexpensive clip-on lamps will work, or you can make a light using a cord with a socket and a painted tin can. Be mindful of electrical needs and extension cords.

14. Make good use of the table area defined by the three sides of your display board. It is a great place to place a model, heavier or larger objects, and other items not appropriate for attaching to the display board.

15. You may use a 3-minute audio or video tape to introduce or add information to your exhibit. This is not necessary and may not be appropriate for many topics.

Hint: Many craft, art, and frame shops have scraps of matte board and foam board. Ask if they might donate their "leftovers" to you for your project.

