

## Hemingway: A Simple Online Tool for Better Short-Form Writing (Museum 2.0)

[Nina Simon](#)

June 22, 2014

[Tool](#)

The screenshot shows the Hemingway App interface. At the top, it says "Hemingway App makes your writing bold and clear." Below this, there are social media sharing options for Desktop Version, Like (28k), and Tweet (3,840). The main text area contains a paragraph: "Hemingway highlights long, complex sentences and common errors; if you see a yellow highlight, shorten the sentence or split it. If you see a red highlight, your sentence is so dense and complicated that your readers will get lost trying to follow its meandering, splitting logic — try editing this sentence to remove the red." Below this, there are three more paragraphs: "Adverbs are helpfully shown in blue. Get rid of them and pick verbs with force instead.", "You can utilize a shorter word in place of a purple one. Mouse over it for hints.", and "Phrases in green have been marked to show passive voice." On the right side, there is a "Write" and "Edit" button, a "Readability" section with a color-coded scale, and a "Grade 7" score labeled "Good". Below the grade, there are statistics: "Paragraphs: 6", "Sentences: 10", "Words: 123", and "Characters: 584". There are also three warning boxes: "1 of 10 sentences are hard to read.", "1 of 10 sentences are very hard to read.", and "1 adverbs. Aim for 2 or fewer."

*[Ed. note: Here’s an app–Hemingway–that might be of interest when fall course prep starts to loom. Nina writes on its application in museums here, but cross-over between the way she’s using it and the potential for use in the classroom seems interesting.....]*

Exhibit labels. Promotional text. Grant proposals. For many arts/museum professionals, writing text in 100-word chunks is a daily activity.

And unfortunately, a lot of that writing is lousy. There are [great references](#) for better art writing, but we don’t always use them. We pack sentences with high-falutin vocabulary, pepper them with clauses, and wrap them up in insider language.

Recently, I discovered an online tool that can change that. It’s called [Hemingway](#). Its intent is “to make your writing bold and clear.”

It does this by offering everything you wish Microsoft Word grammar check provided:

- it keeps track of word count, sentence count, paragraph count, and character count.
- it highlights sentences that are hard to read.
- it highlights phrases that are unnecessarily complicated.

- it marks adverbs and uses of passive voice.
- it judges “readability” by calculating grade level of the text (apparently using [an average of several scoring rubrics](#)).
- it doesn’t flag stylistic flourishes like intentional incomplete sentences. Like this.

I started using it for exhibit labels. When writing exhibit labels, I am constantly checking and rechecking the word count. I use online calculators to assess grade level. It’s a pain and Hemingway takes that pain away.

Then I started using it for chunks of grant proposals. Word counts matter there too. In proposals, it can be easy to fall into jargon and long, convoluted sentences. Hemingway has helped me declare where I used to meander.

Hemingway has one big downside: right now, it’s just an online app. You have to copy and paste text in (and out) to use it. I’m hopeful that they will release a desktop app soon.

And of course, it doesn’t actually channel the voice of Ernest Hemingway. As many have observed, [Ernest Hemingway scores low on Hemingway](#). The app encourages clear, declarative writing, which makes it a poor fit for many creative endeavors. But exhibit labels or marketing brochures? It’s ideal for that.

Now I find Hemingway infiltrating my brain when writing almost anything—including this blog post. It is at an 8th grade level, with four adverbs and two hard-to-read sentences. I can live with that.

(Reposted with kind permission from Nina’s blog, [Museum 2.0](#))

[Hemingway: A Simple Online Tool for Better Short-Form Writing \(Museum 2.0\) | Art History Teaching Resources](#)

## **‘Museums Almost Infantilize Viewers’: A Guerrilla Artist Puts Up Her Own Wall Labels at the Met to Expose Male Artists’ Bad Behavior**

Michelle Hartney is posting her own biographical descriptions next to work by Balthus, Picasso, and Gauguin.

Michelle Hartney carrying out her piece *Performance/Call to Action* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Photo by Becky Levi.

**[Sarah Cascone](#) November 7, 2018**

Artist and activist [Michelle Hartney](#) quietly staged a performance at New York’s [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) on Saturday night, calling on the august institution to reconsider its role in glossing over the sexual misdeeds of some of art history’s biggest names.

Hartney affixed new wall labels next to works by Paul Gauguin, who moved to the South Pacific and [took several native teenage girls as wives](#), and Pablo Picasso, who in his 40s had an affair with the teenage girl Marie-Thérèse Walter. Next to Picasso’s portrait of Walter, *The Dreamer*, Hartney posted a label with her own name and the work title *Performance/Call to Action*.

In the description, she quoted [comedian Hannah Gadsby’s Netflix special \*Nanette\*](#): “The history of western art is just the history of men painting women like they’re flesh vases for their dick flowers,” said Gadsby, who went on to quote Picasso as saying, “Each time... I leave a woman, I should burn her. Destroy the woman, you destroy the past she represents.’ Cool guy. The greatest artist of the twentieth century.”

Alongside Gauguin’s [Two Tahitian Women](#), Hartney posted an excerpt from a February article by Roxane Gay, “[Can I Enjoy the Art but Denounce the Artist?](#)”

“We can no longer worship at the altar of creative genius while ignoring the price all too often paid for that genius,” Gay wrote. “In truth, we should have learned this lesson long ago, but we have a cultural fascination with creative and powerful men who are also ‘mercurial’ or ‘volatile,’ with men who behave badly.”

“I think people are coming around to the idea that providing historical context doesn’t take away from a work of art,” Hartney told artnet News. “Museums almost infantilize viewers by thinking they can’t handle having this biographical information. What’s wrong with with having an aesthetic opinion about a piece of artwork and other feelings about the artist

himself? I look at Gauguin's painting on a aesthetic level, and they are amazing and beautiful. But I also think he was pretty horrible to take three teenage brides. I can have those two feelings about it."

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Bpw4PQFFPWw/>

A representative for the Met declined to comment on the protest, other than to say that Hartney's labels were removed as soon as they were discovered by museum staff.

This isn't the first time Hartney has addressed this issue. Earlier this year, she staged a similar protest at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, her alma mater, appending additional wall texts next to the display of Balthus's painting *Girl With Cat*.



Paul Gauguin, *Two Tahitian Women* (1899). Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Hartney titled her response to the work [Correcting Art History: How Many Crotch Shots of a Little Girl Does It Take to Make a Painting?](#), and offered a description of the artist's "lifelong obsession with young girls." She pointed specifically to his [2,000 Polaroids of a young girl named Anna Wahli](#), sometimes clad only in her underwear, taken over a period of nine years beginning when she was eight. (Unlike with Gauguin and Picasso, this was in the 1990s.)

"Some people could consider those Polaroids child pornography," Hartney said.

"And Gagosian was selling them for \$20,000 each. So far they have sold at least 20, the gallery told me."

# MICHELLE HARTNEY

*American born 1978*

## Correcting Art History: How Many Crotch Shots of a Little Girl Does it Take to Make a Painting?

2018

### Performance/Call to Action

Balthus had a lifelong obsession with young girls, which resulted in his work being surrounded by controversy that he often deflected.

Later in life, Balthus took almost 2,000 Polaroids of an eight-year-old girl named Anna Wahi. He photographed her once a week for eight years, instructing her to lay in highly sexualized positions, sometimes wearing only underpants, with her legs spread wide, arms behind her head, and often appearing as if she were sleeping. In 2013, Gagosian exhibited 155 of Balthus' Polaroids, selling them for \$20,000-\$240,000 each.

Men like Balthus, Picasso, Gauguin, Woody Allen, and Roman Polanski, to name just a few, have been granted immunity, cloaking them with protection from criticism over their actions, in spite of the number of women and girls they have objectified, mistreated, raped, or molested,.

Censoring artists is out of the question, but what is the responsibility of the art institution to educate viewers and turn the presentation of an artist's work into a teaching moment?

Michelle Hartney put this label up next to a Balthus painting at the Art Institute of Chicago earlier this year. Photo courtesy of Michelle Hartney.

The school told Hartney that it would revoke her alumni privileges if she ever did it again. “On one level I get it, but on the other hand, my school is threatening to punish me for a piece of performance art,” she said.

Hartney was inspired in part by a [viral petition](#) late last year protesting a provocative Balthus painting at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. As a debate over censorship swirled, the *Washington Post*’s Philip Kennicott rejected calls for the painting’s removal, or for the addition of a warning label noting that “some viewers find this piece offensive or disturbing, given Balthus’s artistic infatuation with young girls,” as the petition suggested.



Balthus’s *Thérese Dreaming* (1938) sparked a petition demanding its removal at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

“Even that would be a concession too far,” Kennicott wrote. “By that standard, the museum might have to include hundreds, if not thousands, of warning labels, and not just for works made by heterosexual men with an erotic interest in girls.”

As the #MeToo moment picked up steam earlier this year, Kennicott wasn’t alone in his concern that the pendulum was in danger of swinging too far. “At some point you have to ask yourself, is the art going to stand alone as something that needs to be seen?” Jock

Reynolds, the director of the Yale University Art Gallery in Connecticut asked the [New York Times](#). “[Pablo Picasso](#) was one of the worst offenders of the 20th century in terms of his history with women. Are we going to take his work out of the galleries?”

Hartney maintains that she is staunchly anti-censorship, but that museums are doing the public a disservice by refusing to acknowledge the ugly truths about some of the artists in their collections. In February, artist and activist Emma Sulkowicz raised similar concerns with a [performance protest](#) in front of Chuck Close’s paintings at the Met and MoMA.

“I don’t want to preach to museums and say ‘I know the answer,’” Hartney says, “but I think maybe trying a different way of presenting work could be interesting. It could educate even more, which is what these institutions aim to do.”



Balthus, *Girl With Cat* (1937). Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago, ©Balthus.



[Sarah Cascone](#)

[Senior Writer](#)

[‘Museums Almost Infantilize Viewers’: A Guerrilla Artist Puts Up Her Own Wall Labels at the Met to Expose Male Artists’ Bad Behavior](#)

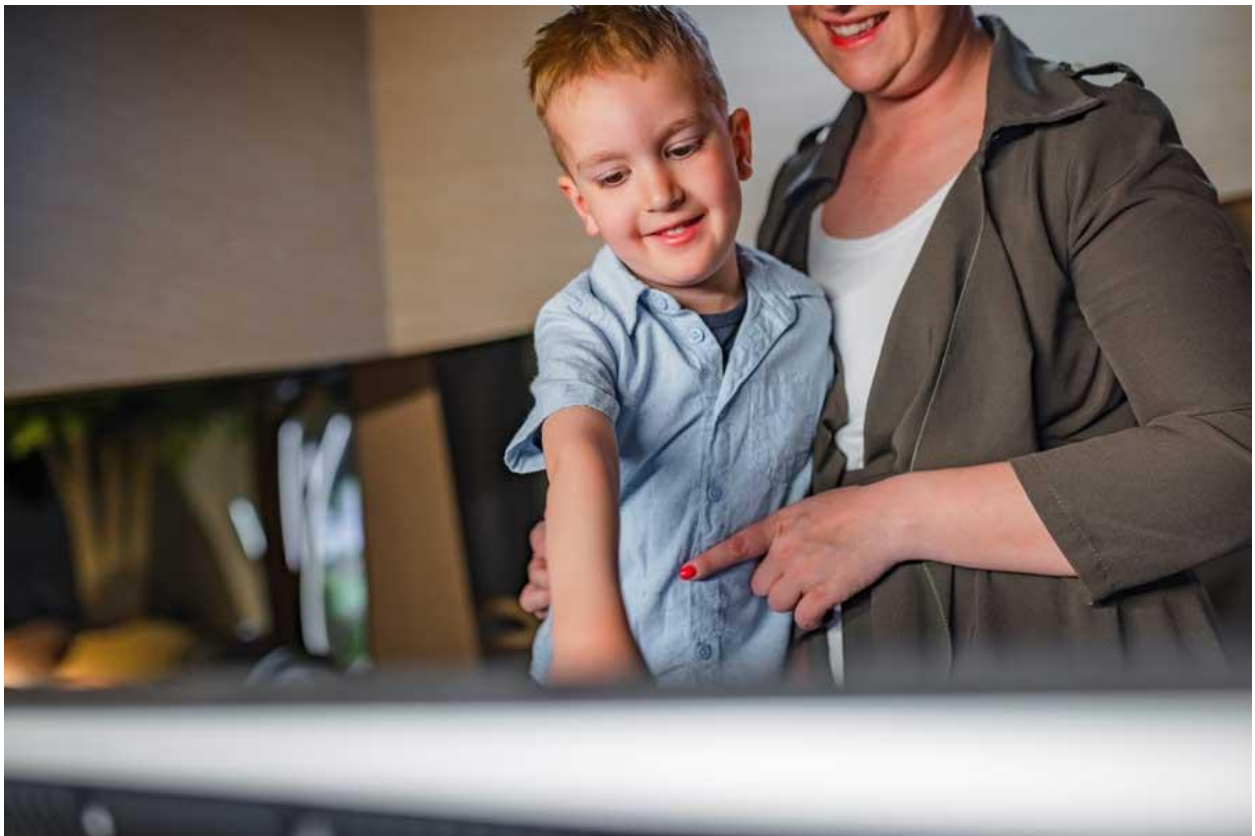
## Exhibition Design and Interpretation

### How to Write Exhibit Labels for Children and Families

November 26 2024



By Manuel Charr



Creating exhibit labels for children and families requires a thoughtful approach that balances education and entertainment. When done effectively, these labels can transform museum visits into engaging, memorable experiences for younger audiences. Here are some tips for simplifying language, incorporating fun facts, and making labels interactive to captivate children and their families.

#### 1. Simplify Language Without Oversimplifying

Children's attention spans are shorter, and their vocabulary might be limited compared to adult audiences. Use simple, clear language that conveys key ideas without being condescending. For instance:

- Instead of: "This artifact represents the early Mesopotamian agrarian economy."
- Say: "Farmers in ancient Mesopotamia used this tool to grow food thousands of years ago."

Avoid jargon and technical terms. When complex ideas are unavoidable, break them into bite-sized explanations using everyday words.

## 2. Incorporate Fun Facts

Kids love discovering surprising or quirky details. Add fun facts that make the objects or stories more relatable and exciting. For example:

- "Did you know this dinosaur's teeth were as big as bananas?"
- "Ancient Egyptians used honey to treat wounds. Imagine putting sticky honey on a scrape!"

These small nuggets of information can spark curiosity and encourage kids to ask questions or share what they've learned.

## 3. Use Active, Engaging Phrasing

Write labels that encourage imagination and curiosity. Phrasing like "Imagine if..." or "What would you do if..." can invite children to interact mentally with the content. For instance:

- "Imagine living in a house made entirely of ice like this Inuit family!"
- "What would you pack if you were traveling across the desert with this camel?"



#### 4. Make Labels Interactive

Interactive elements keep children engaged and make learning fun. Incorporate questions, challenges, or prompts directly into the labels:

- “Can you spot the tiny details in this painting? Look closely at the bottom right corner.”
- “Touch the screen to see how this machine worked in the 1800s.”

If the exhibit includes digital or tactile components, tie them into the label content. For example, pair a question with a hands-on activity or link to an augmented reality (AR) experience.

#### 5. Use Relatable Analogies

Help children understand complex ideas by connecting them to their everyday experiences. For example:

- Instead of: “This pulley system was a crucial innovation for lifting heavy objects.”

- Say: “This pulley works like a playground swing—it helps lift things easily by spreading the weight!”

Relatable comparisons make abstract concepts more accessible and memorable.

## 6. Focus on Stories

Children connect with stories more than facts. Use labels to tell a story about the object or its history. For example:

- “This teddy bear traveled across the Atlantic Ocean with its owner, a little boy escaping World War II.”
- “This sword belonged to a brave knight who once saved a castle from an attack!”

Stories evoke emotions and curiosity, making exhibits more engaging for young visitors.

## 7. Design for Accessibility

Ensure labels are placed at a child’s eye level and use large, easy-to-read fonts. Consider using bright colors, bold headings, and illustrations to capture attention. If your museum supports multilingual audiences, include translations or summaries in the most relevant languages.

## 8. Add Humor and Playfulness

Humor can make exhibits more enjoyable for children and families. Lighthearted language and playful phrasing help create a fun, relaxed atmosphere. For example:

- “This helmet may look funny, but it was perfect for keeping a knight’s head safe!”
- “This critter had 10 legs! Imagine trying to find shoes for all of them!”

## 9. Collaborate with Kids

If possible, involve children in the label-writing process. Host focus groups or workshops to gather their feedback. Their perspectives can help you craft content that resonates with young audiences.

## 10. Encourage Family Discussions

Design labels to spark conversations between children and adults. Include questions like:

- “What would you do if you discovered this fossil in your backyard?”
- “Ask your family: How would you feel if you lived during this time?”

Prompts like these foster deeper engagement and make the museum experience more interactive for families.

Writing exhibit labels for children and families is an opportunity to inspire curiosity, learning, and fun. By simplifying language, incorporating engaging elements, and designing with young audiences in mind, museums can create exhibits that captivate and educate the next generation of learners. With a little creativity and care, exhibit labels can turn a family museum trip into a cherished memory.

About the author – Manuel Charr

Manuel Charr is a journalist working in the arts and cultural sectors. With a background in marketing, Manuel is drawn to arts organizations which are prepared to try inventive ways to reach new audiences.

[How to Write Exhibit Labels for Children and Families - MuseumNext](#)

## Exhibition Design and Interpretation

### What Makes A Great Museum Label? The Science and Art Behind Museum Labels

December 01 2024

By Anna Faherty



The best museum labels do more than provide information. A great museum label takes its reader on a revelatory journey, reframing perceptions along the way and provoking a lasting reaction.

Swarupa Anila, Director of Interpretative Engagement at the Detroit Institute of Arts and juror for the American Alliance of

Museums Excellence in Exhibition Label Writing Competition, sums up just how powerful a single label can be: 'A brilliant label sweeps you into a bodily experience. Eyes widen. Breath stops. Skin rises to goose bumps. Heartbeat quickens. You look around and feel you're seeing a world that never existed before that moment.'

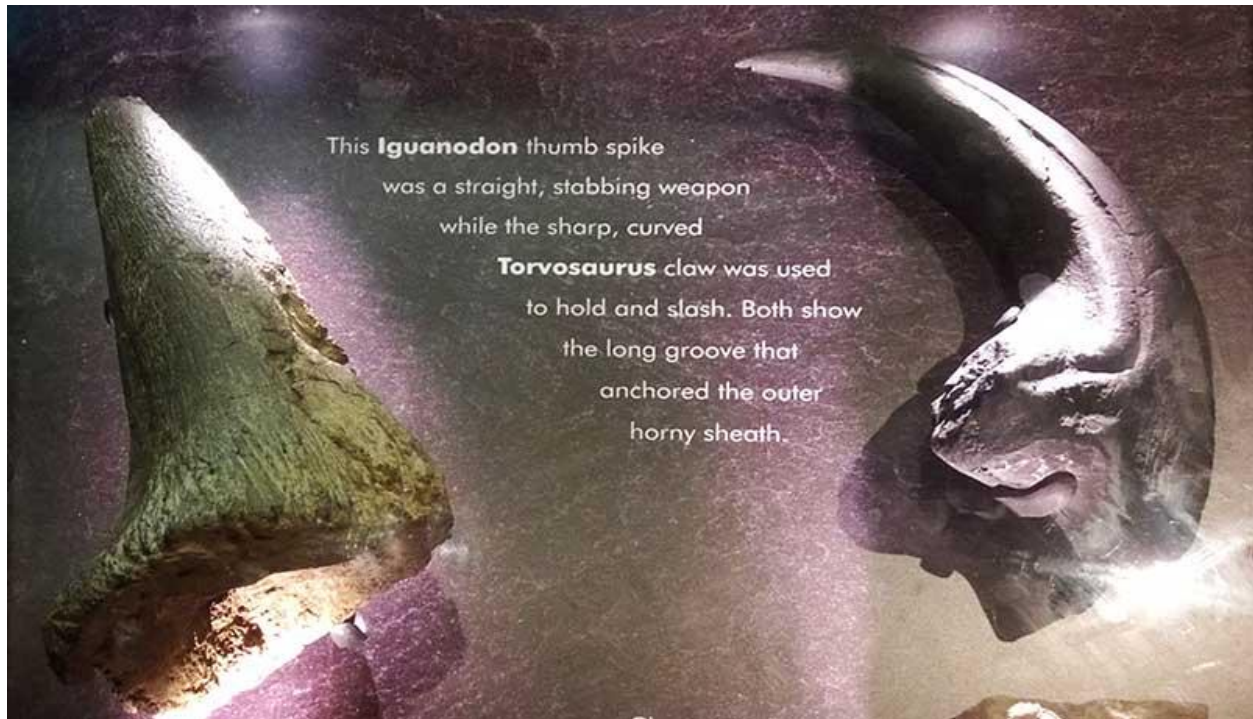
Effective museum labels anticipate and answer visitors' unspoken questions about the artwork or object they accompany. At the same time they forge emotional connections with those visitors. It's obvious, then, that anyone writing gallery or exhibition labels needs detailed knowledge in two areas: the objects themselves and the visitors who will be looking at them. Plus, they need a clear goal that defines what they hope visitors might think, feel or do in response.

A well-worded label meets the visitor in familiar territory, using concepts and terminology that feel like second nature, before revealing a new, and relevant, perspective.

In just a sentence or two, a good object label equips visitors with the tools to look back at the object and draw their own new conclusions about it, conclusions that will be influenced as much by each visitor's unique experiences as by the museum's words.

How museum labels reveal other worlds

Consider this sentence, taken from a label stretched between two artefacts in the dinosaur gallery at London's Natural History Museum:



When I first read this label, I found myself acting out the movements of these long-dead creatures, imagining my own hands equipped with spikes and claws. It made me look more closely at the remnants of the two dinosaurs and encouraged me to consider how each might have used its in-built tool.

These twenty-one words are effective because they combine three elements: familiarity, focus and visualisation. Aside from the names of the dinosaurs, the words are familiar ones I can relate to, which makes for a quick and easy read. The meaning is clear because the text focuses in on just one aspect of the fossils. My thoughts are therefore unencumbered by competing pieces of information. Finally, the use of active terms helps me visualise how these animals, which took their last breaths over 100,000 years ago, might have lived and interacted with one another.

The following paragraph also paints a picture of a very different world. It comes from a label at the Mary Rose Museum in Portsmouth, which houses a sixteenth-century warship:

#### The Medieval Machine Gun

Lightweight and portable, the English longbow was the super-weapon of its time. Accurate at distances over 200 metres, an archer could shoot over 12 arrows every minute. Shot in volleys, these arrows created an inescapable and deadly cloud.

The title and first line incorporate a modern analogy – another use of familiarity – to give new meaning to these 500-year-old weapons. A snippet of factual information then reveals

how powerful a longbow could be. The final eight words, like the active terms in the dinosaur label, help us visualise what it might be like to be on the receiving end of their arrows. Try googling 'longbow' and you'd be hard pressed to find such deep insight, even after reading several hundred words online.

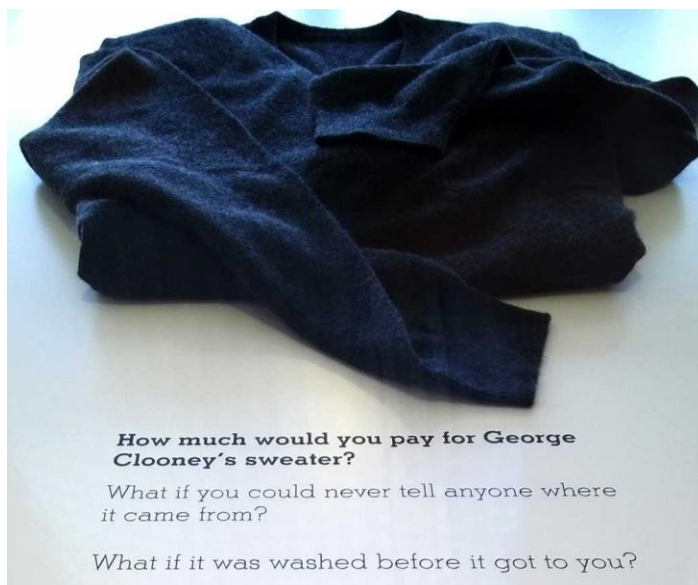
Both these labels reveal something to the visitor, and they do so by reinstating some of the context that is lost when objects are placed in a museum. Reinstating that context helps visitors understand the origin, purpose, use or impact of an object. Truly great interpretation goes even further: it provokes the visitor in some way.

#### How museum labels provoke reactions

In his classic book *Interpreting our Heritage*, first published in 1957, Freeman Tilden defines interpretation as 'an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships'. Tilden emphasises that while interpretation includes information, it also reveals larger truths about the world, just like a well-written story.

Stories can, of course, be entertaining but, for Tilden, the chief aim of museum interpretation is to provoke. Interpretation, he suggests, should inspire a visitor to want to know more and encourage them to search out meanings for themselves, 'join[ing] in the expedition like a fellow discoverer'. In particular, visitors often have the opportunity to question how they would react in a similar situation.

This questioning is explicit in the opening lines of this label from the *Like Me: Our Bond with Brands* exhibition at The Design Museum, London:



The label goes on to share the results of a research study, which found people would pay significantly less for Clooney's sweater if they couldn't tell anyone about it, even less if it had been washed.

Combining that information with our own answers, we realise a more general point, that people sometimes value the story behind an item, and the ability to share that story, more than the item itself. This realisation might, in turn, provoke us to consider what we personally value or why sharing stories is such a fundamental part of human nature.

Each of these three labels reframes our initial view of an object, but here the reframing is, again, explicit. If we don't read the label, we see a plain old sweater, to which we wouldn't usually give a second glance. If we read the label, we reframe our view of the sweater as something potentially valuable.

#### How museum labels reframe perspectives

When we frame information about an object we focus attention on certain aspects of that object or its history. It's just like choosing a new frame for a painting, which then highlights different qualities of the artwork. Framing is less about the information we feature in a label and more about how we present that information.

Marketers are the masters of framing information for the greatest impact. For instance, describing a burger as '90 per cent lean' will prompt different thoughts and actions than saying it has '10 per cent fat', even though both statements derive from the same basic data.

In museums, reframing can be a result of choosing to display an item in the first place or of multiple interpretation decisions across an entire exhibition. Sometimes even a single word can reorient our thoughts. As MuseumNext speaker Seth Godin has written, 'How should I judge this', is something we ask ourselves all the time. When you make the effort to give us a hint, we'll often take the hint'.

Take the black and white photograph, just 14 by 11 inches, displayed in a 2018 exhibition at Delaware Art Museum (DAM) in Wilmington. Some visitors will instantly recognise the scene and its significance. At my first glance, I saw what looked like a sink in the corner of an empty room. Yet choosing to place this photograph in a gallery is, in itself, an act of framing. It suggests there must be something special or important about this place or about the photograph that has been taken of it. It is more, I am led to think, than simply an architectural study.

The exhibition label for the image is a masterclass in how to reveal, reframe and provoke. It starts off with the title:

## Segregated drinking fountains in the county courthouse in Albany, Georgia, 1962

In just ten words and a date, this reveals a lot. I realise that my perceived sink is in fact a water fountain. I realise there are even two water fountains in the scene, one far smaller and less accessible than the other. Most importantly, the very first word acts as a frame that changes my perception again, because I realise each fountain has been demarcated for use by a particular group. Looking back at the photograph, my eyes are now drawn to the signs placed above each fountain; one says 'WHITE', the other 'COLORED'.

Those ten words give new meaning to the photograph, but the rest of the label reveals even more about the world it represents. Written in the first person, these 150 words tell the true story of a six-year-old girl and her encounter with a similar water fountain:

Mame was the strongest, smartest most beautiful woman in my six year old world. On Saturdays she took me with her to the hair dresser and afterwards on a short stroll to Atlanta's municipal market. The market was alive with smells, and voices. Mame would treat me to a hot dog and a bag of warm roasted peanuts. Once while eating the peanuts, I needed water. Looking about, I spotted the fountain which had small wooded steps on one side so that children could climb up to fill tiny paper cups. Feeling pretty brave, I went to the fountain and started to climb the steps. Mame tackled me as I reached the top step and lifted me to a tiny bowl where she turned on the water spigot, and in a quivering voice announced that "this one is for us." Her voice frightened me—it was barely audible, awakening something for which I had no name.

These are the words of African American writer Melva Ware. Ware was one of several people invited by DAM to share personal perspectives when the Museum hosted a travelling show of Danny Lyon's photographs. As part of a wider programme marking the fiftieth anniversary of uprisings in Wilmington following the assassination of Martin Luther King, DAM wanted to include a plurality of voices in the show and, in particular, local voices.

While the title frames the photograph as a symbol of racial inequality at a specific time and place, Ware's personal perspective shifts our thoughts to the impact of such inequality on the lives of ordinary people. For anyone who shares similar experiences, Ware's words will resonate and reframe in myriad other ways.

Like any good story, this one helps us imagine ourselves right there. It even gets our senses buzzing. We hear the hustle and bustle of the market, smell the hot dog and warm peanuts and feel the comfort of being close to someone we trust. Finally, we appreciate the confusion, fear and loss of innocence experienced by Ware at the moment she is

redirected to the smaller fountain – an experience likely to provoke a range of different emotions, depending on our own experiences and views.

Offering revelation, reframing and provocation, it's no surprise this label was one of the winners of the 2019 Excellence in Exhibition Label Writing Competition. But did it work in practice? As any interpreter knows, many museum visitors don't read labels at all, while others only check out the title. However, exit surveys at DAM showed that almost eight out of ten visitors read these 'community contribution' labels. A third stated that reading them changed how they saw the photographs in the exhibition.



Part of the success of these labels was, says Amelia Wiggins, Assistant Director of Learning & Engagement at DAM, down to involving the right people as contributors. Wiggins advises anyone wanting to follow DAM's example to start off doing two things: 1. Be clear on your goals and the perspectives you want to incorporate, and 2. Listen.

Developing close ties with communities and community leaders, says Wiggins, enables you to bring in their perspectives at an early stage of exhibition development, while clarity of purpose will help you choose appropriate collaborators and brief them effectively.

For the Danny Lyons exhibit, Ware and her fellow contributors were brought together at the Museum to select the images they wished to respond to. They were then given a fairly open brief in terms of the label text: to write one or two paragraphs that shared a personal response, a memory, a reaction, a question or a call to action, all written in the first person or as if writing to a friend.

DAM are now integrating community-created content into all their interpretation for special exhibits. I can't wait to see how their approach pays off in even more labels that reveal, reframe and provoke.

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About the author – Anna Faherty

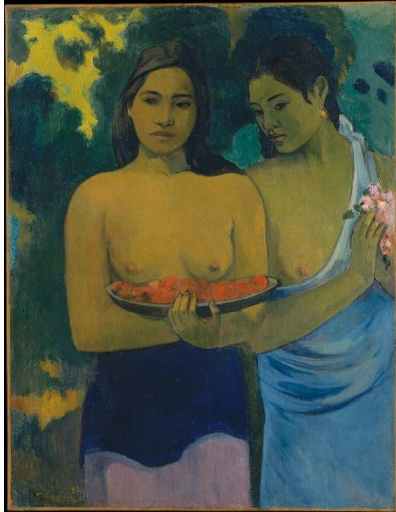
[Anna Faherty](#) is a writer, trainer and consultant who collaborates with museums to find and share stories in an eclectic range of exhibition, digital and print projects. She shares her passion for audience-focused approaches to content development with students at City University, London and University of the Arts London.

[What Makes A Great Museum Label? The Science and Art Behind Museum Labels - MuseumNext](#)

## Do Museum Wall Labels Hide Artists' Misogyny? Gauguin and Picasso Protested at Met

Artist Michelle Hartney has created #MeToo-inspired wall labels to call out the abusive actions of art history's icons

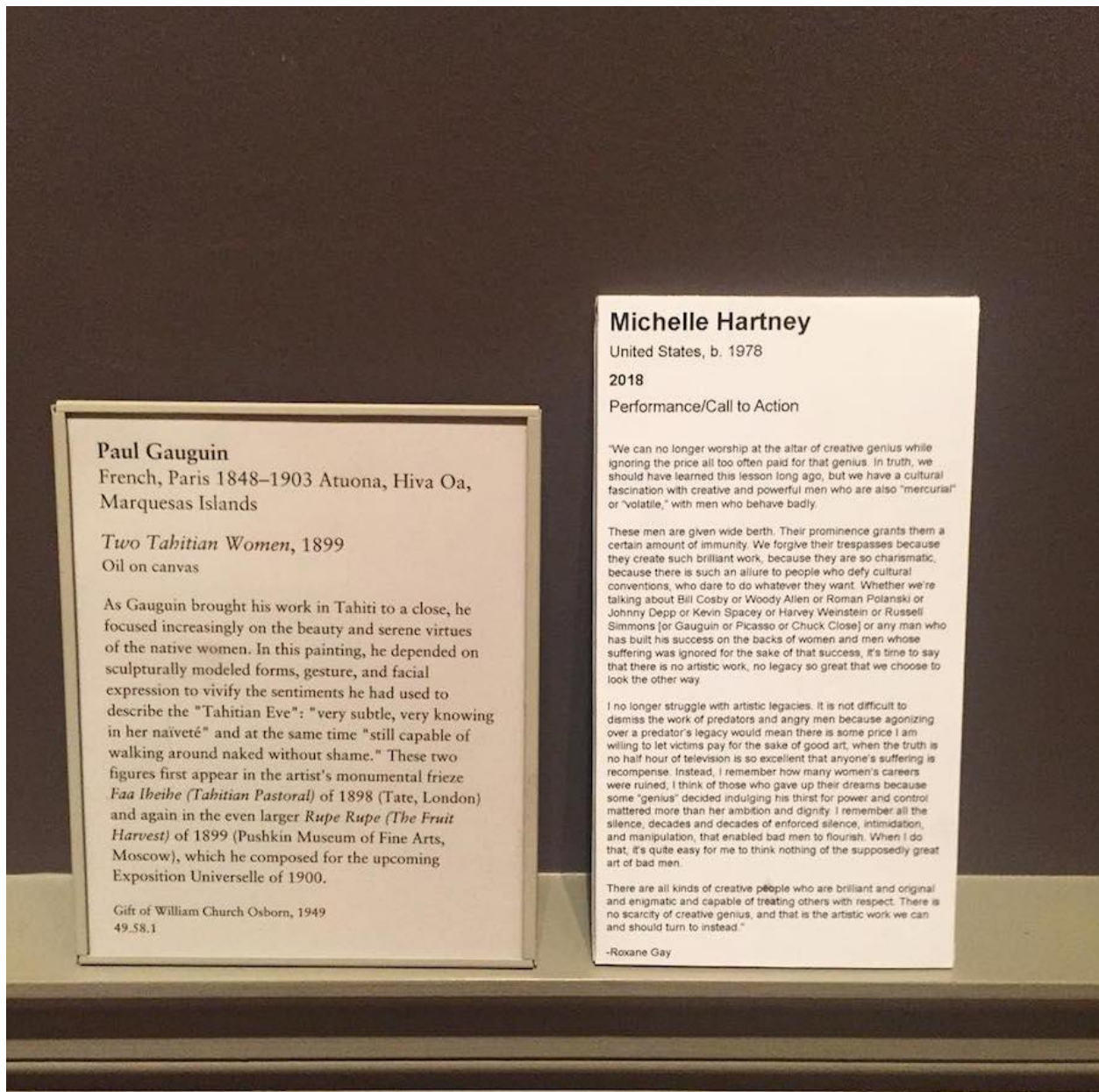
in [News](#) | 08 NOV 18



Paul Gauguin, *Two Tahitian Women*, 1899. Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons

On the evening of Saturday 3 November 2018, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art became the site of a guerilla performance project, zoning in on the abusive behaviour of the male artists that line its walls. Artist Michelle Hartney's *Performance/Call to Action* (2018) subverted displays of artists such as Balthus, Paul Gauguin and Pablo Picasso, by applying her own series of wall plaques across the galleries to highlight their misogyny. While Hartney stressed that she is not advocating censorship of artworks, she argues that museums must do more to educate the public about the darker side of the artists that they venerate. The museum removed Hartney's texts when they were discovered by staff.

Hartney produced her own wall texts to accompany paintings by Gauguin, who infamously took several indigenous teenage girls as his wives on moving to the South Pacific islands of Tahiti and Hiva Oa in the 1890s. Gauguin's native brides were aged just 13, 14 and 14 – he infected them and other locals with syphilis. To accompany Gauguin's work *Two Tahitian Women* (1899), depicting two topless figures, the museum's text describes the artist's focus 'on the beauty and serene virtues of the native women.' In Hartney's intervention, she posted up a label quoting from Roxane Gay's article 'Can I Enjoy the Art but Denounce the Artist?' (2018), in which [the latter wrote](#): 'We can no longer worship at the altar of creative genius while ignoring the price all too often paid for that genius.'



Courtesy: Instagram

Hartney's intervention at the Met also drew attention to allegations of misogyny and abusive behaviour towards women by Picasso. While in his 40s, the artist had an affair with Marie-Thérèse Walter, whom he met when she was just 17. Alongside Picasso's *The Dreamer* (1932), which takes Walter as its subject, Hartney added a piece of text quoting from comedian Hannah Gadsby's Netflix show *Nanette* (2018), which drew critical acclaim this year for its fusion of social commentary, memoir and art history.

In *Nanette*, Gadsby argues: 'The history of Western art is just the history of men painting women like they're flesh vases for their dick flowers.' Considering Picasso's comment that 'Each time I leave a woman, I should burn her. Destroy the woman, you destroy the past she represents,' Gadsby concludes that the artist 'suffered the mental illness of misogyny.'

Hartney created a similar performance earlier in the year in which she applied her own wall texts to Balthus's *Girl With Cat* (1937), on display at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Titled *Correcting Art History: How Many Crotch Shots of a Little Girl Does It Take to Make a Painting?* (2018), she called out the artist's 'lifelong obsession with young girls.'



Hannah Gadsby, *Nanette*, 2018, film still.  
Courtesy: Netflix

The #MeToo era has pushed renewed scrutiny within the art world around issues of display, and the power of museum's wall labels to either conceal or acknowledge artists's sexual misconduct. Art collective The Guerilla Girls recently

created wall labels imagining what a proper response from museums might look like, reacting to allegations of sexual harassment against the artist Chuck Close. 'The art world tolerates abuse because it believes art is above it all,' the collective's labels read, 'and rules don't apply to 'genius' white male artists.'

Some museums have begun to actively revise their captioning to highlight problematic histories, in light of current concerns. In June, the Worcester Art Museum in Massachusetts added new labels to paintings contained within its early American portraits gallery, to identify figures from history who had profited from the slave trade. 'These paintings depict the sitters as they wish to be seen [...] Yet a great deal of information is effaced in these works, including the sitters' reliance on chattel slavery,' the museum's new introductory label states.

[Do Museum Wall Labels Hide Artists' Misogyny? Gauguin and Picasso Protested at Met | Frieze](#)

## Who Decides What Makes a Museum Label Good?

Debates continue to rage over what the placards hung next to paintings should or shouldn't be and say.

By [Daniel Grant](#) • 10/22/24 1:46pm



At the Met's "Manet/Degas" exhibition, museum labels blend in. Photo by Liao Pan/China News Service/VCG via Getty Images

"Most people visiting a museum really want to learn something, so they walk through the exhibits and read all these labels and try to digest as much as they can, but if the label is too long or confusing, they get frustrated and, of

course, they are standing on their feet the whole time, which leads them to get museum fatigue." This assertion by [Katherine Whitney](#), a professional museum exhibition label writer in San Francisco, is sixty-one words long, just a bit longer than her ideal museum label, and probably wouldn't pass her own test for good label writing. Still, her statement reflects a challenge that all art museums face when preparing the placards that ostensibly exist to help visitors who may have no prior knowledge of what they are looking at make sense of artworks in under a minute.

According to Whitney, they should not only identify what the visitor is looking at but also use as few words as possible—just enough to convey the point. Of course, the obvious next question is just how much information is necessary to do that. And on the other hand, how much is too much? In the case of a painting, a museum label should certainly include the title and date of the work, as well as the name and birth and death dates of the artist. Fun fact: placards that only list the title, dates and artist are referred to in the museum field as "dog tag" or "tombstone" labels. Should museum labels identify the subject matter of the painting? For instance, if a work is based on a story from the Bible, is the museum responsible for contextualizing the scene for visitors who aren't caught up on their Bible stories? What if the painting was commissioned during the Counter-Reformation with the intent to push back on anti-Catholic Church sentiment? Should the biblical story be summarized on the label? How about what the Catholic Church hoped the painting would do to reinforce dogma?

That’s a lot to sum up in sixty words—good luck squeezing El Greco into two or three sentences. Some art museums, particularly European ones, don’t even bother and instead identify individual artworks with a number that visitors can use to find more information in a collection catalog that can be purchased at the admissions desk. In the United States, where museums try harder to make sure that visitors leave knowing something more than when they came, “didactic” labels represent the front-line effort to contextualize objects on display.



This placard in the Met’s “The Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism” exhibition stands out by design. Photo by Selcuk Acar/Anadolu via Getty Images

There are numerous other ways in which museums try to inform visitors about what they are seeing: gallery talks offered by exhibition curators or volunteer docents; exhibition catalogs, gallery brochures and large-

print wall texts; and audioguides or downloadable apps that let visitors access information about individual pieces as they walk by them. All of these can convey more than museum placards, in which a mountain of information has to be condensed in a way that’s comprehensible to visitors with little to no knowledge but still engaging. That’s assuming people not only stop in front of a work but also take the time to read.

According to research conducted by the University of Pennsylvania’s Positive Psychology Center, the “modal” length of time people spend in front of individual works of art is about ten seconds, which doesn’t seem like a lot until you consider they may spend less time actually looking at the artwork. Ours is a literate culture rather than a visual one, and “there is a comfort in reading a label,” [Gary Vikan](#), former director of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, told Observer. “You are offered facts that are very relatable, whereas artworks themselves aren’t so easily contained. Labels are a left-brain experience, while art is experiential and not a test of knowledge. In my world, people wouldn’t need the damn label at all.”

That isn’t to say that many people employed by or otherwise associated with museums, including members of curatorial, education, publications and engagement departments, as well as outside consultants, such as Whitney, and volunteers, don’t work diligently to make placards both more helpful to visitors and also less distracting. Labels at many

institutions are written, revised, rewritten and revised again—usually by several different people. “A good curator is very close to the artworks he or she is responsible for,” according to [Ellen E. Roberts](#), director of curatorial affairs at the Taft Museum of Art in Cincinnati, Ohio. “But because of that close relationship, the curator may lose track of the audience. My colleagues and I are not the target audience for a label.”



Godfried Schalcken, *Young Woman Eating Sweets* (1680–85): “Caught in the act. This young woman makes eye contact with us, as she lifts a fingertip of sugar to her mouth. Her other hand clutches a polished silver sugar bowl. Over the course of the 17th century, Dutch imports of Brazilian and Caribbean sugar increased dramatically and prices fell, turning this rarity into a widely available delight. Schalcken rhymes the seductions of sugar with the woman’s sensuality to emphasize the painting’s own allure as a luxury item, ostensibly for male consumers.” Gift of Rose-Marie and Eijk van Otterloo, in support of the Center for Netherlandish Art, Photograph ©

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

At Atlanta’s High Museum of Art, labels originate with a curator, “written with the assistance of curatorial research associates,” and are then passed to the Department of Museum Interpretation for a review of “clarity of narrative and messaging, tone of voice, reading level and word count,” [Mekala Krishnan](#), the museum’s associate director of museum interpretation, told Observer. But they’re not done yet. “There is usually some back and forth between the curatorial and interpretation departments before it then gets passed to our editor, who is the final gatekeeper for formatting, spelling, grammar and punctuation, as well as for overall clarity. From there, they go to design, and each of those three departments has additional rounds of reviews with design proofs.”

Some institutions keep working on their labels even after they are installed, with staffers watching visitors as they move through galleries, timing how long they stand in front of any object and watching their eyes to see if they are reading more than looking. Visitors may be questioned about what they saw: “What did you take away from this exhibition?” or “What do you know now that you didn’t know before?” This is quite labor-intensive and expensive, but it may be the only way to know for certain if the label did its job. Everyone in the museum field looks for a sweet spot, but there is no one “right” placard length, format or

design. However, for several years, the Washington, D.C.-based American Alliance of Museums has offered awards to institutions that were deemed to have the best-written labels via the [Excellence in Exhibition Label Writing Competition](#) (which writers and editors from the aforementioned Taft Museum of Art have previously won). Their criteria for an exemplary label is as follows:

- *A good label gets to the point and anticipates visitors' burning questions about the object it accompanies.*
- *Eschewing superciliousness or obfuscation, a good label uses plain language and avoids cliché and specialist jargon*
- *Like a thoughtful host at a house party, a good label doesn't assume prior knowledge. It sufficiently yet concisely introduces new people, artists and movements (i.e., "American painter Elaine de Kooning").*
- *A good label doesn't exist in a vacuum—it is the extension of a thoughtful interpretive plan and careful collaboration among colleagues.*

Museum placards “get a bad rap,” according to [John Russick](#), managing director of the Bronzeville Center for the Arts in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and author of [Connecting Kids to History with Museum Exhibitions](#), though he does have some negative things to say about them. “You’ll often hear museum professionals make statements such as, ‘No one reads the labels in exhibitions.’ First off, I disagree. Secondly, this is as much a self-fulfilling prophecy as anything else. The truth is that most museums don’t give visitors a good reason to read their labels or to absorb their content.” Russick went on to say that the quality of the writing is generally poor. The size of the text is too small. The contrast between the color of the type and the color of the background is weak, and supplemental graphic choices like illustrations, photographs or maps do little to help visitors understand the art.

But length might be the biggest barrier to visitor engagement. Less is more, asserts [Judy Rand](#), a Seattle, Washington museum consultant who offers workshops in label writing. “The shorter the label, the more people will read it.”

Others argue that less is just less. “A few extra words to help deliver meaningful content is less of an issue than a shorter label that doesn’t engage a visitor or invite them into the conversation,” said Krishnan, who added that the High Museum will go as high as ninety-five words. “Our end goal is to help visitors look more closely and empower them to find something of personal interest.”

Some people seek “historical context, while others want to understand the artist’s vision or are fascinated by technique.” Someone has to make the decision about what to highlight and, at the High, that team working on the labels makes it. “We cue visitors as to what is important.”



Frida Kahlo, *Dos Mujeres (Salvadora y Herminia)* (1928): “Brown-skinned and black-haired, Salvadora and Herminia overlap one another, their bodies pressed into the foreground by thick foliage, alive with butterflies and ripening fruit. Although Kahlo originally planned to depict their ruffled aprons, she eliminated the detail that would mark them as muchachas, or domestic workers. Her heroic depiction of working-class, mixed-race women would have been practically inconceivable in Mexico before the Revolution (1910–20). In the wake of this civil war, middle-class artists like Kahlo looked to marginalized peoples as the models for fine art and representations of progressive politics.” © 2020 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F. / Artists

Rights Society (ARS), New York, Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Museum placards for objects in an exhibition may be treated differently than those for pieces in permanent galleries, as works in thematic exhibits form part of an overall narrative, and each label can offer information that adds to what the previous one already relayed. A show of paintings by El Greco, for instance, might have labels that focus on the work he was creating in a certain place at a specific time. “Each label can fill in gaps, offering parts of the story,” Russick said. More difficult are artworks in the permanent collection that may have nothing in common with any other piece in a gallery beyond the year they were created. In this case, each artwork’s label might present more information, yet not so much as to overwhelm visitors. A difficult task that, ultimately, is never-ending.

A solution to these various quandaries might be found in audioguides, as listening while looking lets visitors focus on the visual components of the artworks. With audio, discussions of individual works can be longer, and visitors can actively choose whether to engage with additional information via QR codes or other prompts. Music relating somehow to the object on display can further enhance the guide. “Younger visitors are the

prime audience since they live on their phones, but they're not the only audience," [Lou Giansante](#), a New York City-based producer of audio tours for museums, told Observer.

Debates still rage over what a museum label should or shouldn't be or do. Some believe placards should only offer the most basic dog tag information (artist name, work title and year); others believe they should describe the work fully or even delve into what museumgoers are not seeing, like the ways an artwork might reveal a time period's racial discrimination, colonial conquest or some other form of marginalization. "What can be said is that the era of an indomitable curator insisting on erudite label copy with polysyllabic words is over," asserted Maxwell L. Anderson, former director of the Whitney Museum of American Art and current president of Souls Grown Deep. "I suspect that over time it will be seen as quaint to use a label as anything more than an object identifier, leading to the next generation of QR codes, whatever that platform might be." Anderson advocates for letting visitors chart their own course, seeking out more information or not.

There are lots of possibilities, but perhaps the option of little to no labeling that one finds in many European museums is worth reconsidering. "Every year, I take my students to the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia, which doesn't provide any labels for artworks on display," James Pawleski, director of education at Penn's Positive Psychology Center, told Observer. "There is no intermediary between the viewer and the art, so students have to deal directly with the art." He is not opposed to labels per se, but like many others, Pawleski has something to say about the many museum placards he sees. "You don't want the label to take away the mystery of the artwork, what makes it interesting and inspiring. That's why I prefer labels that help people become immersed in a work of art."

[Who Decides What Makes a Museum Label Good? | Observer](#)

## Wonderful Museums

### What is the Rijksmuseum Controversy? Unpacking the Debate Over Decolonization, Language, and Historical Interpretation

By [Frank Johnson](#) / July 18, 2025

The Rijksmuseum, a world-renowned institution dedicated to Dutch art and history in Amsterdam, found itself at the heart of a significant cultural debate surrounding its approach to historical language. The **Rijksmuseum controversy** primarily revolves around its initiative to update the terminology used in its collection labels and online database, specifically targeting words deemed offensive, outdated, or laden with colonial connotations. This effort, part of a broader decolonization movement within cultural institutions, sparked widespread discussion about historical accuracy, contemporary sensitivity, and the very role of museums in shaping public understanding.

#### Understanding the Core of the Rijksmuseum Controversy

At its heart, the controversy stems from the Rijksmuseum's "Adjustment of Titles" project, launched in 2015. The museum undertook a systematic review of approximately 220,000 titles and descriptions in its digital collection, aiming to remove or replace terms that are now considered discriminatory, pejorative, or racist. This initiative was part of a larger commitment to inclusivity and to acknowledging the painful legacies of colonialism and slavery embedded within historical narratives and language.

#### The Genesis of the "Adjustment of Titles" Project

The Rijksmuseum's journey towards linguistic decolonization began with a recognition that the language used to describe art and artifacts, particularly those related to non-Western cultures or colonial subjects, often perpetuated harmful stereotypes. For decades, terms like "negro," "Hottentot," "Eskimo," "Indian," and "Moor" were common in museum catalogs and labels. While these terms might have been prevalent during the period when the objects were acquired or described, they are now widely understood to be derogatory or inaccurate. The museum argued that continuing to use such terms in a contemporary context could be alienating and offensive to visitors, particularly those from marginalized communities.

The project was not a simple act of censorship but a scholarly endeavor involving linguists, historians, and experts in post-colonial studies. The goal was to find neutral, descriptive, and respectful alternatives while retaining the historical context where necessary. For instance, instead of "Young Negro Woman," a new title might read "Young Woman" or

include more specific geographic or ethnic information if available and appropriate, such as “Young Woman from Suriname.”

### **Examples of Language Changes**

To illustrate the scope of the project, here are some hypothetical examples of the types of changes made:

- **Old Term:** “Hottentot” (a derogatory term for the Khoikhoi people of Southern Africa)
- **New Term:** “Khoikhoi” or “South African people”
- **Old Term:** “Negro” (a term now widely considered offensive, especially in contexts related to slavery)
- **New Term:** “Black person,” “African person,” or more specific ethnic/geographic descriptors
- **Old Term:** “Indian” (in reference to indigenous peoples of the Americas)
- **New Term:** “Indigenous American,” “Native American,” or specific tribal names
- **Old Term:** “Moor” (often used generically and imprecisely for people of North African or Middle Eastern descent)
- **New Term:** More specific regional or ethnic identifiers, or a more neutral descriptor like “North African man”

The museum’s stance was that these changes were not about erasing history, but about accurately and respectfully representing it in a way that aligns with modern understanding of human dignity and cultural sensitivity.

### **The Two Sides of the Debate: Arguments For and Against**

The Rijksmuseum’s initiative, while lauded by many, also drew considerable criticism, leading to a nuanced and often heated debate.

#### **Arguments from Supporters: The Case for Decolonization and Inclusivity**

Proponents of the Rijksmuseum’s project emphasized several key points:

- **Ethical Responsibility:** Museums have an ethical duty to present history in a way that does not perpetuate harm or reinforce discriminatory views. Using offensive terms, even if historical, can alienate visitors and normalize prejudice.

- **Inclusive Access:** For museums to be truly accessible and welcoming to all, their language must reflect contemporary values of respect and inclusion. Visitors from marginalized communities should not feel insulted or objectified by the terminology used.
- **Decolonization of Knowledge:** The project is seen as a vital step in the broader decolonization of cultural institutions. It challenges the colonial gaze inherent in much of museum practice, which historically categorized non-European peoples through a Eurocentric and often prejudiced lens.
- **Updating Scholarly Practice:** As academic understanding evolves, so too should museum practices. Just as historical interpretations are refined, so should the language used to describe them.
- **Focus on the Subject's Humanity:** By removing dehumanizing labels, the project encourages viewers to see the individuals depicted or the cultures represented with greater respect and empathy.

*“Our objective is to be inclusive, respectful, and accurate. The old terminology doesn’t always achieve that in the contemporary context. This is about adapting to a changing world and a more informed understanding of history.”*

— Rijksmuseum spokesperson

### **Arguments from Critics: Concerns over Historical Accuracy and “Woke” Culture**

The changes, however, were not universally embraced. Critics, including some historians, journalists, and members of the public, raised several objections:

- **Historical Accuracy:** The primary concern was that changing historical terms amounted to “rewriting history” or anachronism. They argued that these terms, however offensive now, were part of the historical context in which the objects were created or acquired, and removing them obscures that reality.
- **“Woke” Culture and Censorship:** Some critics framed the initiative as an example of “cancel culture” or excessive “political correctness” driven by contemporary sensibilities, rather than rigorous historical scholarship. They feared it could lead to a slippery slope where any perceived offensive term from the past is scrubbed, regardless of historical context.
- **Lack of Transparency/Public Debate:** A common complaint was that the changes were made without sufficient public consultation or debate, presenting a fait accompli rather than an open discussion about the complexities involved.

- **Lost Nuance:** Some argued that while certain terms are clearly offensive, others might carry specific historical nuances that are lost when replaced with generic alternatives. Understanding *\*why\** certain terms were used historically can be as important as acknowledging their problematic nature today.
- **Fear of Erasure:** There was a concern that by removing problematic language, the museum was also inadvertently erasing the uncomfortable truths of colonialism and racism, rather than confronting them directly by perhaps retaining the original term but adding explanatory context.

*“While intentions may be good, tampering with historical records, even for well-meaning reasons, risks creating a sanitized version of the past that sidesteps uncomfortable truths rather than confronting them.”*

— *Commentator on the controversy*

### **Broader Implications and the Global Context**

The Rijksmuseum controversy is not an isolated incident but part of a much larger global conversation about the role of museums in post-colonial societies. Institutions worldwide are grappling with similar questions:

- **Restitution of Cultural Heritage:** Debates over the return of looted artifacts to their countries of origin.
- **Representation:** How non-Western cultures and colonial histories are presented in museum exhibitions.
- **Whose Story is Being Told?:** Challenging the dominant Eurocentric narratives and incorporating diverse perspectives.
- **Engagement with Source Communities:** The importance of involving descendants and source communities in the interpretation and display of their heritage.

The Rijksmuseum’s language project, therefore, serves as a high-profile case study for how museums navigate the tension between historical preservation and contemporary social justice. It highlights the dynamic nature of historical interpretation and the ongoing process of decolonization in cultural spaces.

### **Impact and Ongoing Legacy**

The “Adjustment of Titles” project has largely been completed for the Rijksmuseum’s online database, with millions of visitors now encountering more inclusive and respectful language. While the debate has quieted somewhat, the underlying questions it raised

continue to resonate. Other museums globally have looked to the Rijksmuseum's experience, either as a model to emulate or as a cautionary tale.

The controversy underscores that museums are not neutral spaces; they are active shapers of narrative and public understanding. Their choices regarding language, display, and interpretation have profound implications for how history is perceived and how diverse communities engage with their past.

## **FAQ Section: Addressing Key Questions About the Rijksmuseum Controversy**

### **How did the Rijksmuseum identify the problematic terms for alteration?**

The Rijksmuseum initiated its "Adjustment of Titles" project by first using automated linguistic tools to scan its vast digital collection for terms identified as potentially offensive or outdated. This initial scan was then followed by meticulous manual review by a team of art historians, linguists, and experts in post-colonial studies. They researched the historical usage and contemporary implications of each term, consulting with various communities and academic resources to determine appropriate alternatives that were both respectful and contextually accurate.

### **Why did some historians express strong opposition to the changes?**

Some historians opposed the changes primarily on the grounds of historical accuracy and the fear of "historical revisionism." They argued that removing or altering original historical terms, even if offensive today, obscured the historical context in which those terms were used. For them, preserving the original language was crucial to understanding the societal norms, prejudices, and power dynamics of the past, rather than sanitizing history to fit contemporary sensibilities. They believed that instead of changing the terms, the museum should add explanatory context to educate visitors about their historical problematic nature.

### **How has this controversy influenced other museums globally?**

The Rijksmuseum controversy has significantly influenced discussions within the global museum community, serving as a prominent case study for institutions grappling with similar issues of decolonization, language, and representation. Many museums have begun similar internal reviews of their collections and labels, while others have engaged in more public debates about how to balance historical preservation with contemporary ethical responsibilities. It has encouraged a broader conversation about inclusive museum practices, leading to workshops, conferences, and collaborative projects focused on updating terminology, returning artifacts, and re-evaluating colonial legacies in collections.

### **Why is language decolonization considered important in museum contexts?**

Language decolonization in museums is crucial because language is a powerful tool that shapes perception and understanding. Historically, the language used in museum collections often reflected colonial power structures, perpetuating stereotypes, dehumanizing indigenous peoples, and silencing marginalized voices. By decolonizing language, museums aim to: 1) rectify past injustices by acknowledging the harm caused by offensive terminology, 2) foster inclusivity and respect for all visitors, 3) challenge Eurocentric narratives and incorporate diverse perspectives, and 4) ensure that the stories told within their walls are accurate, sensitive, and reflective of a more equitable understanding of history. It's about empowering formerly marginalized communities and ensuring that their representation is dignified and authentic.

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[What is the Rijksmuseum Controversy? Unpacking the Debate Over Decolonization, Language, and Historical Interpretation - Wonderful Museums](#)

## Creating Family Friendly Interpretation

Our top tips for creating accessible family friendly text and panels in your museum or heritage site.



A family at the National Emergency Services Museum. Photo by Msc1 Photography.

Estimated reading time: 7 minutes.

**This guide was created in partnership with Sarah Shaw, Director of [Museum Tales Ltd.](#) Sarah has produced family friendly interpretation for English Heritage, York Art Gallery, Bath Abbey and other venues across the UK.**

Kids in Museums believes that welcoming families to your venue is essential for any museum, but this can be a daunting prospect for staff and volunteers. We've created this short guide to support you and your team to develop a more welcoming environment for families by introducing family friendly interpretation.

Please note this resource does not cover digital interpretation or resources.

## Getting started

Creating family friendly text for your exhibition needn't be difficult, it just needs some planning and thought. Whether you're producing an exhibition aimed at families, or want to enhance your wider interpretation to engage families – you need to plan to be accessible to all ages.



One of the key things to think about is who your exhibition is aimed at. If it's a family friendly exhibition, such as the British Library's [Marvellous and Mischievous: Literature's Young Rebels](#), you'll want to aim your text, design and approach at the whole family, with nods to particular age groups.

However, if families are just a small part of your demographic, you might want to plan a way to share top items, point out key facts and stimulate conversation. You'll notice that places like Tate create discrete, specific family labels made to complement the wider adult audience text. Other venues make use of mascots to highlight family friendly information.

Remember though, that families can be short on time and attention spans, so don't overload them with interpretation. What they want is easy to read, layered interpretation which is complimented by a great family friendly welcome (more advice on this in our [Welcoming families to your venue resource](#)), knowledgeable staff and volunteers, and child friendly resources if you have them (more advice on this in our [Creating Self-Guided Resources for Families guide](#).)

Whichever one you choose, it's essential that you plan for families and think about how you might want to engage with them through your interpretation in the future.

## Knowing your audience

It's important with an exhibition or panel to remember that families come in all shapes and sizes. They have different dynamics, knowledge, points of reference and drivers for coming to your venue.

Before you start writing your text – whether that be for a panel or a whole exhibition – it's worth narrowing down who your text is for.

You can find out more about your visitors by conducting quick surveys at the entrance desk, running focus groups or looking into audience analysis. Perhaps your organisation is part of [Audience Answers](#), or has worked with a market research company. Ask around and then define who your text is for.

## Creating a checklist

Once you've identified your audience, it's useful to create a checklist of your aspirations for your text and how it will meet the needs of your families. This can cover everything from your tone of voice to keeping track of reading ages and getting the narrative of your exhibition across.

This could look like:

- **Is the text aimed at the age of children and family demographic that we're hoping for?**

Look at our guide to [Creating Self-Guided Family Resources](#) for more information on different age groups.

- **Is this text within the word count we've allowed?**

Families need to be able to find information quickly. Set a word count for each type of text (e.g., whole panel, fact boxes, playful prompts, family labels). This might be 100 words for a panel aimed solely at families and 30 words for a fact box for families.

- **Does this text represent the voice we want our families to hear?**

Set yourself a challenge to create a voice for families in your text. Do you want your family text to be playful, authoritative or exploratory? Will you use an active or passive voice? Look at this [playful prompt](#) from Market Hall Museum in Warwick.

- **Does my text meet the needs of the average reading age in the UK?**

The [average reading age](#) in the UK for an adult is between the ages of 9 and 11. Make sure that you're sticking to this by using apps such as [Grammarly](#), [British Dyslexia Association](#) and [Hemingway Editor](#), which tests for complex terms and sentences.

- **Does this do what we set out to do?**

Consider the aims of your text and if your content meets it. Is the aim to share knowledge, set a tone, prompt discussion or something else?

Leeds Museum and Galleries has a fantastic [practical guide to writing text interpretation](#) that covers many of these points.

It's easy to get carried away when you're passionate about a subject, so use your checklist to ensure that you're on the right track. We recommend working with your wider team to create this to ensure buy in from the whole exhibition team.

### **What might family interpretation look like?**

There are many organisations out there producing a wide variety of exhibitions and interpretation for families. From English Heritage's award winning family friendly exhibition at [Birdoswald Roman Fort](#) to the use of mascots and family friendly labels at [Cranwell Aviation Heritage Museum](#).

If you're wanting to go the whole hog and produce panel text aimed at families, remember these golden rules:

- Producing family friendly text isn't dumbing down, it's about making themes, information and stories engaging, readable and appealing.
- Don't assume knowledge and think if technical terms need to be used. If they are used, explain them in brackets.
- Try and avoid fixed routes for reading panels – children often don't follow the linear route you've envisaged.
- Don't shy away from sensitive or challenging topics. Our Kids in Museums guide to [engaging children, young people and families with sensitive topics](#) can offer support with this.
- We recommend stimulating dialogue, encouraging exploration and using active language. 'What do you think? Can you imagine? Have you ever seen one of these before?'
- Think about what content will appeal to families – horrible histories, fun facts, real life stories, myths, legends and animals are all good starting points.

Illustrations are a great way to share more stories about your work, and are super visual prompts for families. If you're doing the same, pick an illustration style that won't date and ensure that when depicting people, that diverse imagery is reflected. Westminster Abbey

has great examples of this across its family programme and interpretation, as seen on the [Families web page](#).

### **Keeping family interpretation accessible**

Bright colours and illustrations are fantastic and can really appeal to families, but remember to keep access principles in mind to ensure that your text is legible and meets best practice recommendations. Read [Exhibitions for All](#), a practical guide to designing inclusive exhibitions from National Museums Scotland.

Think about the height of your labels – can children see them, including those in wheelchairs? Colour contrast is key for accessibility, as is lighting to ensure that labels are easy to read.

Don't forget to produce your family resources in accessible formats too, such as large print guides, Braille, BSL and captioned videos. Many venues now try to utilise other sign languages such as Makaton. In [this Instagram post](#), we share some examples from Wakefield Museums, who have installed Makaton elements throughout their venues.

### **Test, Test, Test**

Finally, when you're producing any text or resources for families, don't forget to write with them, not for them. Perhaps you can set up a focus group to test out your ideas, or ask local families to comment on your panels to ensure that they're fit for purpose. Have a look at the SEND in Museums [Working With Not For Families: A Quick Guide To Consulting With Families](#) resource for more information on this.

### **Further reading/ Useful resources**

The great news is, there are loads of places to go for help when it comes to producing family friendly interpretation. Here's a quick reading list to keep you going:

- [Association for Heritage Interpretation](#)
- [The Children's Country House at Sudbury](#)  
The National Trust's landmark site is testing out new family friendly interpretation all the time.
- [Human Centred Design Handbook – Derby Museums](#)
- [Interpretation guidance – National Lottery Heritage Fund](#)  
The NLHF has produced a fantastic tool featuring clear information on producing accessible interpretation.

- [Evaluation Toolkit for Museum Practitioners – SHARE Museums East](#)  
This toolkit is useful for developing consultation techniques.

### **Further information on reading levels**

- [Grammarly](#)
- [Hemingway Editor](#)
- [Reading level for web pages – Surrey County Council](#)

The Kids in Museums website is packed with advice, case studies and training related to producing family friendly interpretation. This includes:

- [How can your museum support children and young people to respond to the climate and ecological emergency?](#)
- [How can your museum work alongside children, young people and families to develop anti-racist practice?](#)
- [How can your museum engage with children, young people and families with LGBTQ+ heritage?](#)

### **Files for this Resource**

- [Download Creu Dehongliadau sy'n Addas i Deuluoedd \[145.04 KB pdf\]](#)

Tags: [Welsh Language](#)

Categories: [Creating family events and resources](#)

Audience: [Family](#)

[Creating Family Friendly Interpretation - Kids in Museums](#)

**Tuesday, October 18, 2011**

[Balancing Engagement: Adventures in Participatory Exhibit Labels](#)

We've been doing a little experiment at our museum with labels. The Santa Cruz Surfing Museum recently loaned us some fabulous surfboards that tell the co-mingled history of surfing and redwood trees in Santa Cruz. In our quest to make the public areas of the museum more reflective of Santa Cruz culture, we moved these boards from a comprehensive display in the history gallery into a main stairwell, prominently visible from the lobby and throughout the building.

The surfboards are beautifully hung in their new location, but they present a new challenge: we have to write very short labels. They're no longer "an exhibit" per se—more of an evocative design element that hints at an important story told elsewhere in the museum.

We decided to approach the label-writing for these boards in a participatory way. We blatantly borrowed [the brilliant technique the San Diego Museum of Natural History used](#) to write labels based on visitors' questions. We put up the following label along with a pedestal with post-its and pencils:

We're writing a description\* for these surfboards and we need your help.

- What do the surfboards make you think about?
- What do you want to know?

Understanding what you think helps us think about how we display our collections.

*\*note: originally, this said "we're writing a label" but with that phrasing, lots of people wrote creative titles for the surfboards (like the title for a work of art) instead of talking about content of interest.*

Visitors have gone to town, writing both basic questions ("who made them?" "who were the surfers who used them?" "how did they ride the plank?" "how old are they?") and sharing opinions ("better in their natural form," "my joyful youth circa 1963"). We've learned some things that should definitely be on the final label, such as the clarification that the plank on display is not an early surfboard but the raw material used to make one.

We can certainly write a decent label based on this activity. But one post-it threw me for a loop. It said:

“you should do something to spruce these up a bit. I wouldn’t have noticed the boards except for the post-its.”

Maybe this person was writing about his or her preference for neon paper products, but I doubt it. It was the activity that drew this person (and probably others) to the surfboards—not the objects themselves.

And that leads me to a basic question: Is it better to replace the post-its with a label that answers visitors’ questions, or to continue to support this participation? Instead of clearing the post-its and putting up a nice, discreet label (my original plan), we could keep the post-its and just write answers to the questions directly under them. Or, we could write a starter label based on the questions asked thus far, but then invite (and respond to) additional ones.

The fundamental question here is how we balance different modes of audience engagement. You could argue that visitors are more “engaged” by an activity that invites inquiry-based participation than one that invites them to read a label, even if they never get answers to their questions. Or, you could argue that this kind of active engagement should be secondary to sharing information, which can be more efficiently communicated by a label.

If museums are truly about inquiry-based models for learning, we need more tools—especially in history and art museums—to promote inquiry-based engagement. Science centers and children’s museums promote inquiry-based learning with multi-sensory experiences that are focused more on igniting curiosity than providing answers. Seeing how people responded to these simple post-its made me consider the relative paucity of tools we have to “ignite curiosity” in art and history institutions. If museums of all kinds are going to make serious claims about being places for 21st century, multi-modal, inquiry-based learning, we’ve got to have robust, diverse onsite experiences to back them up.

In this case, given the location on the stairs, we’re likely to replace the post-its with a label as planned. But the bigger question remains: How can we promote true inquiry in our institutions, and how can we give visitors the tools not just to ask but to debate, discuss, and address their questions with each other?

Posted by Nina Simon 

Labels: [exhibition](#), [interactives](#), [participatory museum](#)

[Museum 2.0: Balancing Engagement: Adventures in Participatory Exhibit Labels](#)

North Carolina Museum of Art

### Exhibition Planning and Label Writing 101: Top Tips(**Story**)

Many college courses in art history or art appreciation assign students the task of developing an exhibition of visual art. Does this apply to you? If so, read on! We interviewed NCMA curators Jennifer Dasal and Caroline Rocheleau to get the scoop on selecting works of art for exhibition and writing labels about them. Scroll down for the curators' Top Tips:



#### TOP TIP #1: KNOW YOUR PURPOSE

##### **What do you want your audience to know or learn?**

Curators Dasal and Rocheleau are unanimous: you cannot select works for an exhibition, nor write any label text until you've thought through this question. Answering this prompt lets you know which objects to include in your exhibition to drive home your message. When selecting objects ask yourself: How does this object support the theme of my

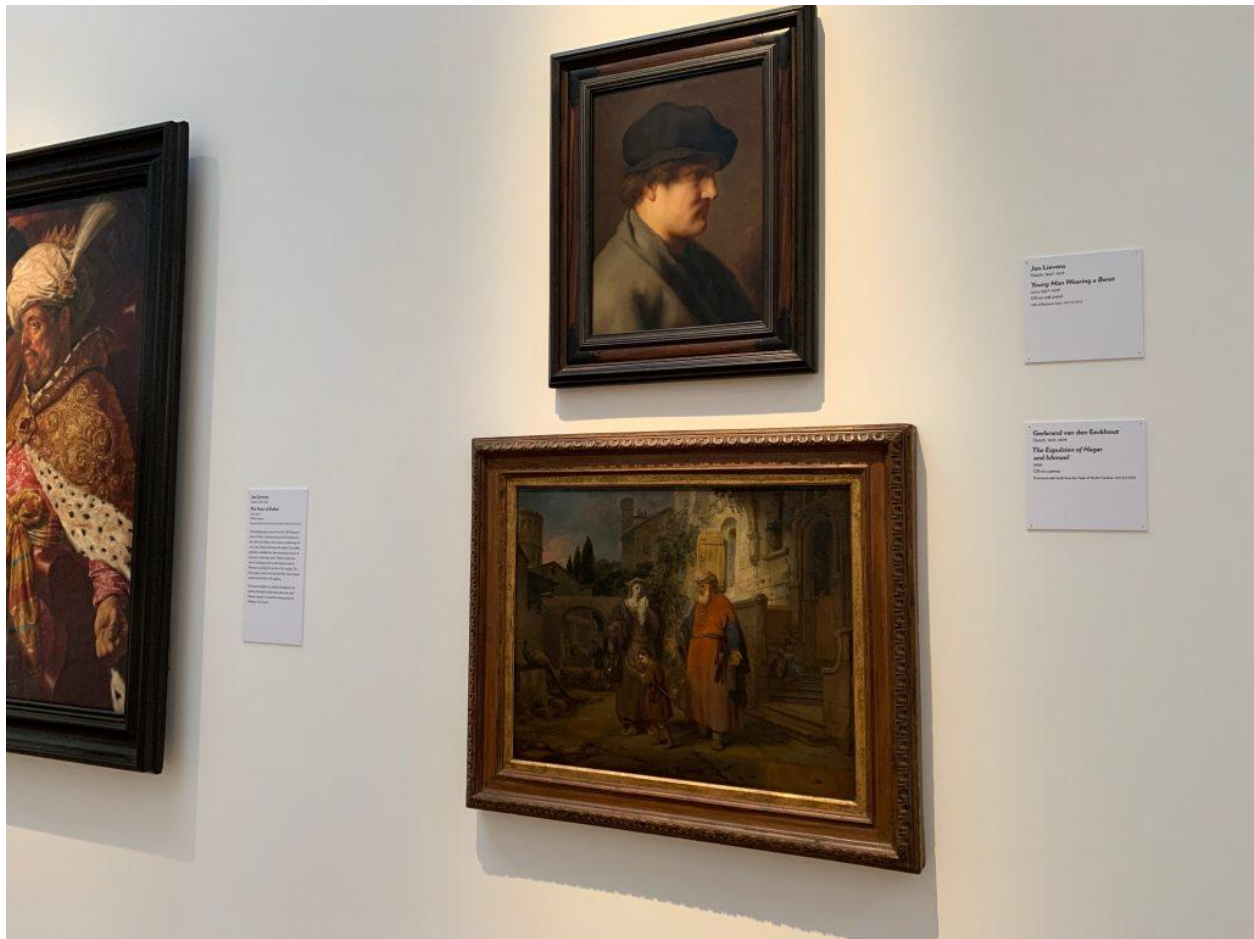
exhibition? What does this object bring to the conversation that other objects do not? Select objects on individual merit, but also think about how the group of objects work together as a whole to drive home your message.

## TOP TIP #2: BE CONCISE

### **What information will you include, and what information will you leave out?**

Dasal and Rocheleau agree— it's great to be thorough in your research and compile as much information as possible about the works of art you've selected for your exhibition, but once you are ready to write labels you need to make choices about what to include, and what not to include. This connects back to Top Tip #1 – what do you want your audience to know or learn? Visitors are easily overwhelmed when presented with too much information at once, so when writing labels, leave out details that don't support the overall message of your exhibition. Labels should contain no more than 120 words.

Some works in an exhibition may have labels that contain only the tombstone information—the most basic details about the work of art (artist's name, title, date, medium, etc.). Other labels will contain both the tombstone as well as paragraphs of informational text. As you create your exhibition, consider which works of art should have tombstone-only labels, and which should have accompanying text. Remember you don't want to overwhelm your visitor, so include text for works of art that best reinforce your exhibition's message.



The two paintings on the right have tombstone-only labels.

Sometimes curators use a stand-alone text panel to address a topic that relates to the exhibition, but is not specific to a single object or set of objects. Consider whether your exhibition requires a separate text panel:

## The Myth of Osiris

According to the Greek writer Plutarch, the god Osiris was the first king on earth, a great ruler who civilized the Egyptians and introduced the cultivation of grains. Osiris was worshipped as a deity of agriculture, and his jealous brother Seth decided to have him eliminated to take his place. Seth trapped Osiris in a coffin and threw it in the river. Upon hearing of the death of her husband, Isis set out to look for him. She found and hid the coffin in the marshes until she could give Osiris a proper burial.

Seth fell upon the coffin while hunting in the marshes and, in a fit of rage, tore Osiris's body into pieces and scattered them over Egypt. Isis and her sister Nephthys found all the body parts but one. Anubis came to help them piece together the broken body, wrap it in linen bandages, and perform the funerary rites. Isis used her powerful magic and resuscitated her husband, with whom she coupled before he descended to the underworld to rule in the kingdom of the dead.

From her union with her revived husband, Isis conceived a boy named Horus, heir to the throne of his father. Seth contested this claim but ultimately lost when, after a lengthy debate among a council of deities and numerous challenges, Horus was declared the rightful successor to Osiris. This myth tells us about the prevailing succession of kingship—from father to son.

This text panel from the NCMA's Egyptian galleries tells a story of Osiris, as many works nearby relate to Osiris.

TOP TIP #3: CREATE A FORMAT AND STICK TO IT

**How will you organize the information you want to share?**

According to Rocheleau, labels are a visual experience that should be pleasing to the eye. Visitors unconsciously register the aesthetic appeal of a label, and the “look” of a label should match the “look” of an exhibition. When creating labels for ancient works of art, Rocheleau, Egyptologist and Curator of Ancient Art, uses the following format for the tombstone:

Culture (e.g. Cycladic)

Place of Origin (if known)

Date and/or Time Period (e.g. Early Cycladic Period, circa 2500-2400 B.C.E.)

Material(s) (e.g. marble)

Credit line (e.g. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. X, 1986)



***Mosaic***

Roman  
2nd century  
Marble, glass

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Hanes, 1979 (79.6.9)

Dasal, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, uses a slightly different tombstone format for works of art produced more recently, where artist names and biographical information is known:

Artist's name, year born

City/location born, where they (the artist) live now or their year of death

Title

Date

Medium

Credit line

Once your labels are all assembled for an exhibition, remember to look at them all together and see that they are uniform in format and style. By doing this, visitors can better connect the works of art and make their own conclusions regarding the information provided.

## FINAL TIPS

Rocheleau says: “Remember that the objects are the reason for all the labels.”

Dasal advises: “Don’t be afraid to have your voice stand out on a label! Consider your own opinions on the art when writing labels while keeping the information objective.”

Good luck! Write, revise, and ask a friend to read what you’ve written to see how well you’ve communicated your message. Then, revise again!

### **Grade level**

[8th Grade](#), [9th Grade](#), [10th Grade](#), [11th Grade](#), [12th Grade](#), [College](#)

### **Subject Areas**

[English Language Arts](#), [Visual Arts](#)

### **Concepts**

[Communication](#), [Interdependence](#), [Meaning](#), [Storytelling](#)

[Exhibition Planning and Label Writing 101: Top Tips – NCMALearn](#)

## Creating the new Europe 1600–1815 Galleries

### Writing Labels & Gallery Text

[Dawn Hoskin](#)

Furniture, Textiles & Fashion

October 31, 2013



With over a year until the Europe Galleries re-open, it may come as surprise to learn that we are already nearing the final stages of editing and confirming the text that will appear in the galleries. Indeed, we are doing so, even before the cases and walls, to which they will be fixed, exist!

In-situ-text is the term used to refer to all text that will be provided for visitors in the galleries – on walls, in cases and on plinths. It includes the text provided at the entrance to the suite of galleries and to each individual gallery, where we establish the overarching themes presented. It also

embraces the text used to introduce each individual display and the labels accompanying each object.

The purpose of in-situ text is to help provide key information and help increase visitors' understanding of the objects and subjects in museum displays.

There are numerous methods that can be used to provide additional layers of interpretation in galleries. The Europe Galleries will also include films, audio-trails, activity areas and digital apps [more details of which will appear in future blog entries]. However, the

fundamental form of interpretation that visitors expect to be present within galleries is in-situ text. Lucy Trench (Lead Educator for the Europe Galleries) describes succinct, focused in-situ text as 'the bedrock of interpretation'.



There is currently a hive of activity as we finalise the label text for each object and display.



Writing gallery and label text is very different from writing books or scholarly articles. Distilling large amounts of detailed information or research about an object into a succinct, relevant, interesting and widely-accessible label can be a complicated, tricky and at times frustrating task. The use of labels in museums and galleries is a widely debated topic and there are numerous publications, articles and websites that propose and discuss the ‘best methods’ to use when writing labels.

The V&A has its own set of text guidelines, which you can read here [[V&A Text Guidelines](#)]. These show the V&A approach and all curators are expected to refer to it. Lucy Trench also runs training sessions for young curators, or those who need a refresher to prepare themselves for major projects. I won’t delve into the thorny topic of ‘label style’ debates here, but will instead provide a brief overview of the process we have used to produce the label text for the Europe Galleries.

Each object label will provide at a minimum what is known as ‘tomb-stone’ information – short factual information about the object and its creation. This includes categories such as:

- What it is
- Where, when and by whom it was made
- The materials and techniques used to make it
- Any inscriptions on it
- Its museum number

Some object labels will include further text providing more detailed information or descriptions. Additional text may be needed to explain exactly what a particularly unusual object is or how it was used. Alternatively extra information about one particular object may provide useful further context for the rest of the display. The space available in each display case determines the number of labels that can be included and how much description they receive.

Each Subject Parent (the person who has led the development of a display’s contents) meets with our Assistant Editor Susanna Haddon to discuss which objects would most benefit from additional text and how the space available for labels could be most effectively allocated.

- Each Subject Parent then writes up the first draft of label text for their display.NB: Although an individual creates the first draft, the writing of labels is very much a collaborative process. Labels will appear in the gallery without an author's name, which helps remove any sense of an individual having sole ownership over their content.
- The curator overseeing the gallery that the display is in (the Gallery Parent) then collates, checks and edits the text for all of the displays in their gallery. This helps to ensure that there is consistency of style, tone and terminology.
- The labels are then circulated to the different collecting departments (e.g. Metalwork, Ceramics etc.) to ensure that all the information is correct, clear and reflects any recent discoveries they may have made when researching the objects.
- The labels are then submitted (with all comments, edits and suggestions) to the Europe Concept Team who sign-off of the label text and pass it on to the Assistant Editor working on the Europe Galleries.
- The Assistant Editor is then responsible for editing the final version of the text.
- The Lead Educator for the Europe Galleries then checks through the text before it is circulated it to all of the people mentioned above for final comments.
- The text is then submitted to the designer who will create the final label design.

This is a long and involved process but it helps ensure that any inaccuracies or confusing phrases are noticed and amended – and also that there is consistency through the suite of galleries. The production dates for some objects could be amended to be more precise following recent research discoveries. The label for this bird organ was also reworded to avoid references to 'bird organs' conjuring up the image of a bird's innards!



It might sound slightly surreal but we have also undertaken mock-ups of the labels for some displays.



The display's Subject Parent, the Europe Galleries Concept Team, Educators and Assistant Editor all attend so that any changes can be discussed there and then.



These sessions have proven to be really useful. They help us to avoid the glitches that can occur when objects, labels and design come together for the first time, during the installation of the galleries.

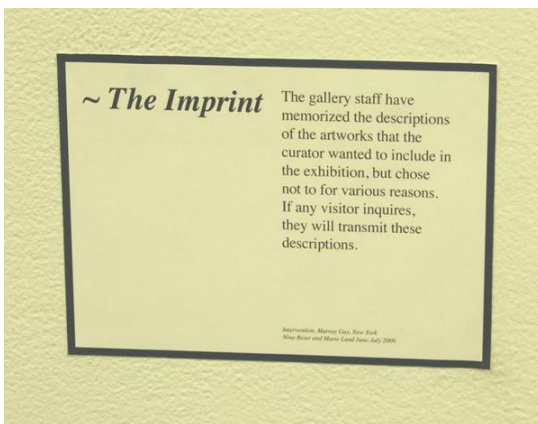
Laying out the label text in an approximation of the display arrangement allows us to experience and get a clearer idea of how it may be read and understood by visitors to the gallery. This helps us to assess how well the labels' ordering of information works: for example, if any technical terminology is clearly explained before it is referred to in a later nearby label. It also allows us to consider if we have made best use of the label space and where contemporary quotes or imagery could be effectively included in the label strips.



We need to bear in mind constantly that it is impossible to predict from which direction visitors will approach a display and which labels they will choose to read or not read. We can't assume that visitors will read all of the labels preceding a certain object so information needs to be clear without being repetitive.



I'm sure many of the curators would appreciate the sentiments of this label!



You can hear Lucy Trench speaking in more depth about the importance of gallery interpretation in relation to the Europe Galleries in this podcast <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/v/v-and-a-podcast-europe-galleries/>

[Writing Labels & Gallery Text • V&A Blog](#)

## Exhibition Design and Interpretation

### 10 Tips for Writing Effective Museum Exhibit Labels

December 26 2024



Exhibit labels are a vital component of any museum experience. They serve as the bridge between the objects on display and the visitors, offering context, enhancing understanding, and sparking curiosity. Writing effective labels can elevate a museum exhibit from interesting to unforgettable.

Here are ten tips to ensure your exhibit labels captivate and inform your audience.

#### 1. Know Your Audience

Before you begin writing, think about your visitors. Are they school groups, families, researchers, or general audiences? Tailor your language and content to match their level of knowledge and interest. Avoid overly technical jargon unless you're targeting specialists.

For instance, a curator at a children's science museum shared how they once transformed a confusing technical explanation into a playful description involving a superhero scientist. The new labels received positive feedback from kids, sparking questions and excitement.

#### 2. Be Concise

Visitors often skim exhibit labels rather than read them in full. Aim for brevity, keeping labels between 50-100 words whenever possible. Focus on the most essential and compelling information to avoid overwhelming your audience.

One museum professional told MuseumNext how a lengthy label in their exhibit caused a bottleneck of visitors. Trimming it down to a few key sentences not only improved traffic flow but also increased visitor engagement with the display.

### 3. Start with a Hook

Grab your visitors' attention right away. Use an intriguing fact, a question, or a thought-provoking statement to draw them in. For example, instead of writing, "This vase is 2,000 years old," try, "Imagine holding something crafted two millennia ago."

A history museum curator told MuseumNext using the phrase, "This sword once changed the course of a kingdom," to introduce a medieval artifact. Visitors' curiosity often led them to ask staff for more details.

### 4. Use Simple, Active Language

Clear, active sentences are easier to read and understand. For instance, instead of saying, "This painting was created by the artist in 1890," say, "The artist painted this in 1890." Avoid passive voice and overly complex sentence structures.

### 5. Focus on One Key Idea

Each label should communicate a single, clear idea. Resist the temptation to include too much information. If additional details are essential, consider offering a [QR code](#) or a booklet for further reading.



## 6. Make It Relatable

Connect the object or concept to something familiar to visitors. For example, instead of describing a historical artifact as simply “old,” explain how it was used and how it might compare to something similar today.

One museum used a relatable comparison by describing an ancient Roman cooking pot as “the slow cooker of its time.” Visitors instantly understood its purpose and context.

## 7. Incorporate Stories

Humans are natural storytellers. Whenever possible, weave a short story about the object, its maker, or its journey to the museum. Stories create emotional connections and make exhibits more memorable.

A natural history museum included a story about how a fossil was discovered by a farmer’s child on their property. Visitors often mentioned this anecdote as a highlight of their visit.

## 8. Be Inclusive and Accessible

Use language that is inclusive and respectful of diverse audiences. Additionally, consider readability by using larger fonts, clear contrasts, and language that accommodates various literacy levels. If your museum caters to multilingual visitors, provide translations or summaries in other languages (Read more on [Museum Labels and Accessibility here.](#)).

At one museum, adding Braille labels and offering audio descriptions helped blind and visually impaired visitors fully engage with an exhibit, leading to overwhelmingly positive feedback.

#### 9. Test Your Labels

Before finalizing your labels, test them with colleagues or a small group of visitors. Gather feedback on clarity, length, and engagement. Adjust based on their input to ensure your labels resonate with your target audience.

A museum director shared with MuseumNext how their team's test revealed that younger visitors misunderstood certain terms. Adjusting the wording made the labels more accessible to families.

#### 10. Design for Readability

The design of your labels is as important as the text itself. Use legible fonts, adequate spacing, and an uncluttered layout. Place labels at an appropriate height and angle for easy reading. Avoid reflective surfaces that could make the text hard to see.

A design team at a history museum learned that repositioning labels at an average adult's eye level significantly increased engagement, as visitors no longer struggled to crouch or tilt their heads to read.

[10 Tips for Writing Effective Museum Exhibit Labels - MuseumNext](#)

## **Label Writing Resources**

The Writing on the Wall: Visitor-Centered Labels in Art Museums

Smithsonian Institution Webinar

[The Writing on the Wall: Visitor-Centered Labels in Art Museums](#)

How to Write an Exhibit Label

Vermont Historical Society Webinar

[Webinar: How to Write an Exhibit Label](#)

How to Write an Art Exhibition Label / Create Art Exhibition Label for Children's Artwork

Denver Art Museum Webinar

[How to Write an Art Exhibition Label | Create Art Exhibition Label for Children's Artwork](#)

Anatomy of an Object Label

San Antonio Museum of Art YouTube

[A video about the little labels they put next to art in a museum](#)

How it Works: What's in a Label with Curator Ann Poulson

Henry Art Gallery YouTube

[How it Works: What's in a Label with Curator Ann Poulson](#)

Kids in Museums (lots of great resources)

[Home - Kids in Museums](#)

British Columbia Museum Association

[The Art of Writing for Exhibitions - BCMA](#)

[The Art of Storytelling in Exhibitions - BCMA](#)

[The Art of Storytelling in Exhibitions - BCMA](#)

Sarah Cascone

[‘Museums Almost Infantilize Viewers’: A Guerrilla Artist Puts Up Her Own Wall Labels at the Met to Expose Male Artists’ Bad Behavior](#)

Manuel Charr / Museum Next

[How to Write Exhibit Labels for Children and Families - MuseumNext](#)

Anna Faherty / Museum Next

[What Makes A Great Museum Label? The Science and Art Behind Museum Labels - MuseumNext](#)

Frieze

[Do Museum Wall Labels Hide Artists’ Misogyny? Gauguin and Picasso Protested at Met | Frieze](#)

Daniel Grant / Observer

[Who Decides What Makes a Museum Label Good? | Observer](#)

Gail Gregg

[‘Your Labels Make Me Feel Stupid’](#)

Dawn Hoskin / V&A Blog

[Writing Labels & Gallery Text • V&A Blog](#)

Frank Johnson

[What is the Rijksmuseum Controversy? Unpacking the Debate Over Decolonization, Language, and Historical Interpretation - Wonderful Museums](#)

Kids in Museums

[Creating Family Friendly Interpretation - Kids in Museums](#)

Museum Next

[10 Tips for Writing Effective Museum Exhibit Labels - MuseumNext](#)

Nina Simon / Museum 2.0

[Hemingway: A Simple Online Tool for Better Short-Form Writing \(Museum 2.0\) | Art History Teaching Resources](#)

[Museum 2.0: Balancing Engagement: Adventures in Participatory Exhibit Labels](#)

North Carolina Museum of Art

[Exhibition Planning and Label Writing 101: Top Tips – NCMA Learn](#)

Smithsonian Institution Webinar

[The Writing on the Wall: Visitor-Centered Labels in Art Museums](#)

Vermont Historical Society Webinar

[Webinar: How to Write an Exhibit Label](#)

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