# Label Standards
# [Exhibition Name]

| Label Type | Paragraphs | Words | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Main exhibition label | | | |
| 100 main labels | | | |
| 110 main labels | | | |
| 111 main labels | | | |
| Photo labels | | | |
| Artifact labels | | | |
| [Other] | | | |
| [Other] | | | |
| [Other] | | | |

## Some General Principles

- No set of standards works for every exhibition. Create realistic standards that suit the needs of your exhibition. Allow for exceptions when necessary.
- Brevity is grace. Keep labels and paragraphs short. Visitors will more likely read short chunks of text than long, unbroken blocks of words.
- Trim away the nonessential. Make every word count. Your readers will appreciate it.

## Label Type

- Avoid more than three levels of main labels: 100, 110, 111. Other "stand-alone" text labels may be needed, but they may also indicate that you are trying to cram in too much information.
- If you use a main label style that includes short summary lines (see *America by Air*), specify a word count for them and the labels in which they will appear.
- An example of an "other" label type might be a series of biography labels that appear throughout an exhibition.

## Paragraphs

- Most labels will be one paragraph. Try not to exceed three paragraphs in longer labels.
- Usually, paragraphs should not exceed 50 to 60 words. If they reach 80 or 90, look for ways to break them up.

## Words

- Choose either a maximum number of words or a target range to shoot for, but allow flexibility. Accuracy and clarity are more important than strict adherence to a word count.

*See below for examples from previous exhibitions*

**Label Standards — *America by Air***

**General Guidelines**

- Paragraphs in all types of labels should not exceed 50 words.

- Except for photo/graphic labels, titles are not included in word counts.

- The proposed Smithsonian "Exhibition Standards" state, "First-level (basic) labels and wall texts should not exceed 100 words." I take this to mean the main introductory label for each of the four major sections and all the main introductory labels on all the panels.

- Some flexibility should be allowed to accommodate the occasional exception. However, no more than one label per exhibit panel should be allowed to deviate by more than a few words from the standard length guidelines described below.

**Main Introductory Label**

- 100 words max.; 2–3 paragraphs

**Panel Main Label**

- 15–25-words, boldface summary/lead-in

- 75 words max., body text; 1–2 paragraphs

**Subtext Label**

- 50–75 words; 1–2 paragraphs

- No more than two of these labels per panel; no further "levels" of subtext labels

**"Story Label"**

- 120 words max.; up to 3 paragraphs

**Photo/Graphic Label**

- 50 words max. *including title*; most should be 25 words or less; 1 paragraph

**Artifact Label**

- 50 words max. for most small artifacts.

- 100 words max. for larger or more complex artifacts;
  break down into multiple labels if more text is required

**Label Standards —** *Pioneers of Flight*

**General Guidelines**

- Paragraphs in all types of labels should not exceed 50 words.
- Titles are not included in word counts.
- The proposed Smithsonian "Exhibition Standards" state, "First-level (basic) labels and wall texts should not exceed 100 words." I take this to mean the main introductory label for each of the four major sections and all the main introductory labels on all the panels.
- Some flexibility should be allowed to accommodate the occasional exception. However, no more than one label per exhibit panel should be allowed to deviate by more than a few words from the standard length guidelines described below.

**Main Introductory Label**

- "Amelia Earhart and the Lockheed Vega"
- 5–10-words, boldface summary/lead-in

**Main Introductory Label Subtitle**

- "First Woman to Fly Across the Atlantic, 1932"
- 15–25-words, boldface summary/lead-in

**Panel Main Label** (vertical and horizontal panels)

- One People (biography) and one Technology (main artifact) main label on each panel
- The number of Context (Expanding Presence) labels for each panel will vary
- 100 words max. each; 2–3 paragraphs per label
- Technology label will include credit line
- Artifact number will go in left hand column of script

**Specification Label**

- For the main aircraft and rocketry artifacts
- Please use the UHC aircraft and space artifact specification sheets as your guide

**Subtext Label**

- Optional, allows for more detail for Context labels
- 75 words; 1–2 paragraphs
- No more than two of these labels per panel; no further "levels" of subtext labels

**Photo/Graphic Label**

- 1 paragraph
- 50 words max.
- Include source credit

**Artifact Label**

- 50 words max. for most small artifacts.
- 100 words max. for larger or more complex artifacts; break down into multiple labels if more text is required
- Includes credit line
- Artifact number will go in left hand column of script

**Label Standards — Time and Navigation**

**General Guidelines**

- **Typography:** Single space between sentences, do not indent paragraphs.
- **Paragraphs:** Up to about 50 words, no more than 75.
- **Label text:** Ideally, most should be about 50 words or less.
- **Max. length:** The longest usually should be no more than about 100 words; subdivide the label if longer.
- **Exceptions:** All rules have them, but they must be *exceptions*.

**100 Main Label**

- Title
- Summary line: up to 15 words
- Paragraphs: 1
- Length: 50-75 words

**110 Main Label**

- Title
- Summary line: up to 15 words
- Paragraphs: 1 to 2
- Length: 50-75 words

**111 Main Label**

- Title
- Summary line: up to 15 words
- Paragraphs: 1 to 2
- Length: 50-75 words

**Artifact**

- Title: Name of artifact
- Paragraphs: 1 to 2
- Length: 50-100 words (longer if a major artifact, but may need to subdivide)
- NASM object credit line:
    *Gift of [name of donor]*
  NMAH credit line):
    *Gift of [name of donor]*
    *Lent by the National Museum of American History, Behring Center*

**Photo or Graphic**

- No title (perhaps some rare exceptions)
- Paragraphs: 1
- Length: 50 words or less

**Label Standards — *Hawaii by Air***

| Label Type | Paragraphs | Words | Actual Averages |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Exhibition main label** | 3 | 120 | 121 |
| **100 main label** | 2 | 75 | 73 |
| **110 main label** | 1 | 50 | 55 |
| **111 main label** | 1 – 2 | 60 | 62 |
| **Photo captions** | 1 | 30 | 28 |
| **Artifact labels** | 1 | 50 | 53 |
| **100, 110, 111 main labels** | -- | -- | 61 |