

The Synopsis - telling the judges about your exhibit
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Introduction

Nowadays, more and more shows, as part of your exhibit application, are asking you to submit a title page and/or a synopsis, sometimes both. Why is this? It's because they are considered vital, as they better define your exhibit. Providing the judges with these documents beforehand will make it easier for them to evaluate your exhibit.

Note: The advice given in this article represents the opinions of the authors as of the above date, and is also in line with the description of the title page in the 7th edition of the American Philatelic Society's (APS') Manual of Judging and Exhibiting. It may change over time as new and valuable insights come to light.

The Title Page - telling everyone about your exhibit, the article found elsewhere on this web site, has introduced you to the format of the title page, the page that defines your exhibit. Now, you ask, what is the **synopsis**? What is the synopsis for?

Your synopsis is a list of information about your exhibit that you provide to the judges before the show. It will help them to research your topic beforehand and to evaluate it at the frames. It is also your chance to tell them about the significant items you are showing and why you have included them. The better your synopsis, the more likely the judges will understand your exhibit and give it the medal it deserves.

Layout

Start your synopsis with your exhibit heading, then follow it with the stamp show name and draft date. If you decide to submit an improved one later on before the show's deadline, don't forget to change the date.

Be aware that the current Judging and Exhibiting Manual recommends that you don't repeat your exhibit's purpose and scope as written on your title page in the synopsis.

Instead, use the other headings on the Adult Exhibit Evaluation Form (EEF) as a guide to formatting your synopsis, relating your exhibit to each in turn.

What is the EEF? It is the form the judges use to evaluate and provide you with feedback about your exhibit. You will find it on the APS website under Events/Shows, Judges and Judging, Manual and Scoresheets.

The EEF criteria are (like many of the concepts in this article, these criteria may change over time):

- Treatment (organization, clarity, balance, subject completeness)
- Importance (subject, philatelic and exhibit importance)
- Philatelic/Subject Knowledge (selection and application, brevity, correctness)

- Personal Study and Research (evidence of significant personal study or original research)
 - Rarity (challenge, difficulty of acquisition, no artificial limitations on items)
- Indicate how they are identified in the exhibit. If possible try to provide exact numbers (e.g. one of two known). Also, here you may list a limited number of what you consider your significant items.
- Condition (physical condition and appearance in light of quality obtainable)
 - Don't worry about Presentation, as you will be covering it under Treatment, Purpose and Scope.

Changes - Include a short paragraph on what has changed since the exhibit's last outing, e.g., completely remounted, treatment changed, new items added.

References

These are the sources of information on your exhibit topic that will help the judges understand it. They have to read up on all of the exhibits at the show, so they may not spend more than an hour looking at your references. Aim to provide a limited number of easily accessible and preferably brief references, in English, if at all possible. Here are some more tips to maximize the amount of information they can glean:

- List no more than four references. One or two may be sufficient.
- Don't list references that are unavailable to the judges.
- List the best reference first and explain why it is so important.
- Make them specific (don't refer to "selected newsletters of a certain specialist society").
- Supply page numbers to be even more specific, if it means saving the judges time looking through a source for the relevant material.
- For highly relevant but short and/or hard to obtain material, consider emailing it as a PDF to the Exhibits Chair, or sending photocopies with your entry form.
- Personally written articles make great references if they are relevant and cover all the questions and concerns the judges might have. You can email these as PDFs or send photocopies.
- Make sure any website links listed have been tested, and are accessible to all.
- Try to avoid listing publications written in another language, unless that is all that's available.

What not to include

There is no need to make a list of prior shows in which the exhibit has been entered and the medal levels gained. Your exhibit will be judged on its own merits.

Readability

To make the synopsis more readable and visually appealing, you can format it into two columns, use a different font or color for headings, highlight important text in some way, and even add scans, pictures or maps. Don't get too carried away though! Make sure your font size is at least 10pt and preferably greater.

Length

Your synopsis should not take up more than two pages. If you feel you have covered all the topics on one page, then that would be fine too.

Learn from others

We would like to thank Tony Dewey for giving us permission to link to his excellent synopsis for his Connecticut Tercentenary First Day Cover exhibit. See

http://www.malariastamps.com/exhibits/exhibits_images/DeweyConn/Synopsis.pdf

It incorporates many of the suggestions made above, and is available on the AAPE exhibits webpage (search for “Connecticut” as there are over 50 exhibits). Do yourself a favor and check it out!

OK, let’s do it!

Don’t be intimidated by having to prepare a synopsis. Just use the headings above and tell the judges what they need to know to best judge your exhibit. Remember, you know your topic better than they do!