

## Access for all



# Core standards for design, display and communications: Norfolk Museums Service

## Context

This document sets out some agreed core access standards for display and communications work in NMAS. It does not cover everything, and will be subject to change as other issues or concerns arise and need to be addressed.

The document concentrates on physical and sensory access issues. Consideration also needs to be given to making text and other information accessible to people with learning difficulties and people with a wide range of learning styles. It is also crucial, for similar reasons, to use a range of interpretive methods, and not rely solely on text.

All of these issues are complex and no set standard will fit all cases. It is important therefore for project teams to involve the **Learning Team** and **Access Advisory Group** at all stages of planning a new project, to ensure we reach our audiences effectively.

## Planning guidelines for accessible displays

The following are some key points that all project teams will take into account:

- All project teams to involve the Learning Team and Access Advisory Group in their planning process, at an early stage before any key elements are set in stone, including partnerships and agreements with artists.
- External partners who may be developing text or interpretation, and NMAS display and marketing contractors, should made aware of these standards at an early stage and should agree to meet them.
- All project teams to ensure that displays at accessible sites are comfortably viewable and accessible to wheelchair users; taking into account clear pathways around displays, heights of objects and labels, and working to reduce any barrier to viewing labels and objects in cases. At the same

time, viewing comfort and accessibility for other visitors needs to be considered. The standards given in this document are intended to meet the needs of both wheelchair users and other users as far as possible, but this will need testing on a case by case basis. The Access Advisory Group is well placed to help.

- Project teams should not solely rely on text for display interpretation. Audio, video, and touch exhibits need to be considered.
- Display films should be either subtitled or accompanied by a transcript; transcripts of audio elements to be made available too. Consideration should be given to adding BSL signing to the main film, or having a BSL signed version to select. Audio description is another technique that should be considered to make films/audio elements accessible to visually impaired and blind people.

### **Font sizes**

We will use accessible fonts, sans serif in style, and with clear letters. Arial, Frutiger, Interstate and Helvetica are good examples. Where an exception is made for a specific reason, a larger font size will need to be used.

**Normal documents** – such as letters and e-mails - will use at least 12 point text.

**Gallery labels** will use at least 16 point text as a **minimum** size. The text will need to be larger than this, 20 point plus, where:

- There is reduced contrast between text and background.
- Labels are at a greater distance from the reader, behind glass or at a less than ideal height.
- Light levels are low.
- **Gallery graphic panels and detailed copy on posters/ events posters** will be in at least 36 point text in almost all cases. However, they may drop to a minimum of 26 point in occasional cases, but only where there is good visibility and they can be viewed close up. The font size may go up to 48 point for a panel in dim lighting or to be viewed high up or at a distance.
- **Leaflet copy** is normally 12 point, but may be 9-10pt for captions or credits, and other secondary information.

- **Large titles** which need to be seen across a large gallery space will ideally be at font size 100 point. Other signage will be similarly as large as possible.

### **Use of text in graphics panels, leaflets and other public information**

- **Graphics panels** should be around 300 words, well broken down into paragraphs and using short sentences, ideally with information layered through the panel, beginning with a summary of the key points.
- **Labels** should be around 100 words, clear and concise.
- **Leaflet copy** should be concise, as there is usually very little space for text if font size standards are to be maintained.
- Wherever possible, a **large print** version of text should be produced and be available to all in the gallery.
- Copy for general audiences should be non-specialist, non-technical, jargon-free, and simply written.
- **Braille labels** should be produced for touch exhibits.

### **Design issues : use of text**

- There should be a high level of contrast between text and background, with text normally in a dark colour on a light ground.
- A border for text labels, where the label background colour and wall colour are similar, would considerably assist legibility, and make labels stand out more for the viewer.
- 'Reversed out' text (light text on dark ground) should be used sparingly and not for large amounts of text.
- The background to text should almost always be solid colour and unpatterned. If an image or design is placed behind text, it needs to be very faded out, with the text in large font, and good clear contrast. This technique should be used sparingly.

- Text in display cases also needs to be comfortably readable for seated and standing visitors – angled or raised label stands may be required for text on the floor of a desk or wall case.

### **Locations of graphics/ labels/ objects.**

- 1200mm from the ground is the preferred centreline for labels mounted vertically on a wall, or in another location directly next to the viewer. This would make the label roughly 1100-1300mm from the ground. Up to 1400mm, labels are still comfortably readable for seated and standing visitors.
- If labels are located especially low down or high up, the font size will need to be increased considerably to make the text comfortably readable.
- Light on labels – should be between 100-300 lux. If light levels are low to protect objects, label text will need to be at least 20 point.
- Labels should be in consistent locations and without things in front, so people can get close to read.
- Avoid siting a label in a corner, where wheelchair users cannot get close to it.
- Desk cases – Smithsonian guidelines have 915 as optimum accessible desk case height, with the base of the case at least 685 from the ground to allow wheelchair access under.

### **Useful publications**

See the Access Resources boxes at each site, and in display department. Of these, the following are especially helpful on text and signage :

- The Smithsonian Museum Guidelines on Accessible Exhibition Design are especially good on optimum heights and dimensions of displays and interactives for wheelchair accessibility.
- The 'Sign Design Guide' by Peter Barker and June Fraser would be very helpful for a signage project.
- 'Access in Mind' by Ann Rayner, which is comprehensive and includes interesting stuff on inclusive marketing materials.