The Design and Evaluation of Exhibition Catalogs

SIDNEY E. BERGER

Greer Allen, in his article on "The Design and Printing of Library Exhibition Catalogues," gives an excellent overview of the problems that producers of these catalogs might face, and he suggests ways of anticipating and dealing with these problems. He considers the crucial issues of the purpose of the catalog, the readers' expectations, the feasibility of the project (as a function of money and time), and the standards one should set in terms of physical results. His understanding clearly comes from having dealt with institutions, librarians, designers, printers, and funders. As an award-winning designer himself, he understands the possibilities and limitations, and anyone taking on the project of producing an exhibition catalog should read his essay carefully and heed his words.

In this article I offer comments supplementary to Greer Allen's, coming from two approaches: 1) basic book design concepts; and 2) the parameters that have guided the judges of the RBMS Exhibition Catalogue Awards Committee. These perspectives will be considered in separate sections, but there is considerable overlap between them.

BASIC BOOK DESIGN CONCEPTS AND THE DESIGN OF EXHIBITION CATALOGS

In The Design of Bibliographies I point out that the design of any listing of books must follow some basic book-design principles, and that bibliographies and exhibition catalogs present particular challenges for the designer. Such books will contain at least two distinct parts: the prose section(s) which inform readers about the collections or exhibitions which are the subject of the book, and the listing of items representative of the collection. Exhibition catalogs have this listing function in common with bibliographies, but they differ in many ways. Whereas the bibliography aims at listing sources (books, manuscripts, letters, documents, pamphlets, and other graphic or non-graphic materials) with the express purpose of offering source information to its users, the exhibition catalog simply presents information about items in an exhibition.3

Sidney E. Berger is Head of Special Collections, University of California, Riverside.
Of course, most exhibition catalogs go much further than this to describe the larger collections which surround the exhibited items. They may also treat history, literature, biography, and other areas of inquiry which 1) make the contents of the exhibition catalog more understandable; 2) put the exhibition into a broader historical or intellectual context; or 3) explain the institution’s acquisition and handling of the materials in the collection. Sometimes catalogs go further, naming donors, thanking library supporters, and making a case for increased support. In other words, exhibition catalogs can be brief guides to components of larger collections, and they also serve a public relations function.

Regardless of the functions the catalogs serve, they must follow certain standard principles of design to be of maximum use and attractiveness. Use is an extremely important consideration, for in essence the exhibition catalog is a reference tool; a poorly designed reference work can inhibit research and lead a scholar astray. As Greer Allen says, “When things are done within [the reader’s] expectations the reader apprehends the message of the catalog without interruption. As soon as those boundaries of that universe of expectations are crossed, the reader is distracted.” Allen is here recalling the classic statements about typography by Stanley Morison, Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson, and Beatrice Warde. Though these have been quoted many times, they remain at the heart of any design of printed materials.

In his famous work, “First Principles of Typography,” Morison states that “any disposition of printing material which, whatever the intention, has the effect of coming between author and reader is wrong.” His dictum is that typography’s primary aim is utilitarian, not aesthetic; its goal is to convey a text to a reader, not to please the reader’s artistic sensibilities. If it does the latter, all the better; but anything that distracts from the text is an intrusion and should be avoided.

Cobden-Sanderson, in speaking of the many niceties that could go into the design of a book (paper, typeface, inks, page layout, binding materials, and so on), similarly says, “each contributory craft may usurp the functions of the rest and of the whole and growing beautiful beyond all bounds ruin for its own the common cause.” The point is that a designer can select an eye-catching typeface, can use a bright ink (red or blue, for example), or can have exceptionally wide margins; but these things call attention to themselves and, in so doing, call the reader’s attention away from the text.

Beatrice Warde’s notion of The Crystal Goblet summarizes what Morison and Cobden-Sanderson believe. She says that typography should be invisible—as invisible as the goblet that holds a fine wine. As the quality of the wine shines through the crystal, so the content of the text should shine through the physical object that contains it.

Exhibition catalogs present a special case, since they are records of visual presentations of materials, and so the catalogs themselves may be more visual objects than a standard bibliography. A splashy catalog may mirror the brightness and visual appeal of its exhibition; and if so, a certain amount of calling attention to itself is not out of place. A wonderful catalog done at Yale University’s Sterling Memorial Library
on pop-up and other children's books had a brightly colored cover which contained two pop-ups, one at the front and one at the back. It was so charming that one could hardly forget the cleverness and beauty of the cover while reading the pamphlet. But the catalog was an example of some of the items in the exhibition, so the splashy element of the pop-ups was appropriate for the catalog.\textsuperscript{8}

One of the first things to decide—based on a number of criteria, not the least of which is the money available\textsuperscript{9}—is the size of the catalog. At a lecture to the Roxburghe Club many years ago, Ansel Adams said that no book should be so big that it cannot be taken comfortably to bed. How comfortable it is to handle will determine, in part, how useful the catalog is for the people looking at the exhibition.

If an exhibition is well planned and executed, with good explanatory labels for each item, and with a clear statement somewhere at the exhibition site about the significance of the entries and the exhibition as a whole, then there may be no need of an exhibition catalog for those in attendance. However, catalogs can offer much more information than the exhibition labels can, and they can be taken away and read at leisure. Further, they can reach a remote audience and serve public relations and other informational purposes. They can say things about the exhibition that the exhibition cannot say for itself, since the space a catalog has for explanatory text is theoretically limitless while exhibition cases have finite space. And the extensive research that goes into many an exhibition can be presented in the catalog, with the understanding that anyone interested enough in the topic to visit the exhibition would be interested in knowing more than the displays can impart. In fact, many catalogs are models of scholarship, presented in reference-book style, and worth keeping on one's shelf for frequent consultation.

The physical dimensions of an exhibition catalog should be as large as necessary to accommodate all the information the author needs to convey, but small enough to be handled comfortably, both at the exhibition cases and in one's own study. This, of course, is terribly vague; but it is the most circumspect thing one can say. The award-winning catalog from the Houghton Library at Harvard, \textit{Marks in Books},\textsuperscript{10} was an oversize folio, unwieldy and fairly impossible to consult at the exhibition cases (or in bed); one needs a large table on which to read it. But what it displayed needed a large format. That was the ideal size for showing all the kinds of marks that need to be interpreted in the margins, on the covers, and in the texts of books.

The so-called portrait format (that is, with the height greater than the width) is the norm for books. But many books are printed in landscape format (width greater than height) without detriment to usefulness or attractiveness. Again, the contents will help a designer to decide which layout is better. My recommendation is that if the contents demand a landscape format, use it; but for any other case, the more common portrait format is preferable. It is more familiar to us (hence less distracting); it is easier to hold and browse through; and it costs no more. On the other hand, since many catalogs contain illustrations of items in the exhibitions, the landscape format allows for an illustration and commentary to appear on the same page, side by side. However, the
landscape format yields a very long line measure, requiring either a two-column layout or a typeface large enough to allow the reader to move easily from one line to the next on a long measure. This is no problem, but the more concessions like this the designer must make, the less familiar the reader will feel with the object. In reading over hundreds of catalogs, I have often felt uneasy with floppy (i.e., paperbound) landscape-shaped pamphlets. We are most comfortable with familiar forms and formats.

A designer must also choose the size and style of typeface to be used. Scholarship on this subject falls into a few distinct areas: legibility of particular typefaces, readability of various type sizes, familiarity of a general reading audience with particular faces, line length with respect to type size, and so on. In brief, there is no consensus about all of these factors, but researchers agree on a few things. For example, the typeface must be one without any peculiarities. Hence, most scholars say that a standard, familiar roman face is best. Italics and boldface types should be reserved for stressed words, titles, section headings, and other areas of the type block than the text. The main text should be in a roman face, between 10- and 12-point type, set to a measure short enough that the reader will not have any trouble moving from one line to the next. Notes should be set in the same face, but may be a point to three points smaller. Headings should be in the same or a compatible face.

Dicta about typography must be taken with a grain of salt, however. Any page design which is pleasing, does not distract the reader from the text, and blends well with the content is acceptable. With typographic design, one should not make rigid pronouncements. The form may fit the content in a number of ways. An exhibition catalog on a painter may use some peculiar mixtures of colored papers and inks to demonstrate some of the painter’s own mixtures. Sans serif type (almost uniformly criticized by designers as too “modern” and as calling attention to itself) is perfectly respectable in a book on Eric Gill, whose Gill Sans is one of the more familiar types of the twentieth century.

As for ink, use black. This one rigidly pronounced dictum may be ignored, but only at great risk. Other colors are distracting and less legible than black. A number of otherwise well designed catalogs are seriously weakened by the “nicety” of their green or brown inks. This is one of the few areas of design that allows little experimentation. Readers’ expectations are strong in this regard, as Allen points out. He says that there should be “no fireworks, no surrender to advertising’s insidious demand for novelty.” We expect to see black ink when we open a book or pamphlet. The designer should rarely thwart those expectations.

Margins make up a significant portion of every page, so they should be well thought out. Flush-left and either ragged-right or justified lines are the norm. Studies have shown that ragged-right setting does not inhibit legibility, comprehension, or reading speed. If a line is justified, the spacing between letters and words will vary, and some awkward hyphenation may be necessary. This is not the case with unjustified lines, which can break comfortably at the ends of words. The longer the line measure,
the easier it is to achieve relatively uniform spacing with justified lines. But if a page is to be set in columns, a shorter measure will result; and the shorter the measure, the better it is to use ragged-right setting.

Also, very wide margins may give a sense of luxury and sumptuousness, but margins that are too wide are just as distracting as those that are too narrow. The elegant page proportion employed by medieval scribes and rediscovered by Jan Tschichold may serve as a model (see figure 1); or one might use the so-called “Golden Section” as it is described by John R. Biggs (see figure 2). There are other ways of determining attractive margins. But no preordained method need be followed; that is, margins need not be inviolable. Some exhibition catalogs have illustrations or even text printed right up to the edge of the page. If it serves some contextual purpose, there is nothing wrong with this. However, binders often ignore such peculiarities of typography, and trim away until the text block fits the boards or wrappers that they have available. Narrow margins are asking for trouble.

One criticism that might be leveled at some catalogs is that they are not illustrated. In theory, if the catalog is designed to be carried around the exhibition, illustrations are superfluous since the reader will be able to see the actual items. However, some subjects cry out for illustration. Imagine an unillustrated catalog on a cartoonist, a calligrapher, an artist, a bookbinder, or a collection of illustrated or children’s books. The lack of illustration would be a great detriment to the catalog.

Every illustration should be clearly labeled and, where appropriate and possible, printed close to the pertinent text. Captions should point to the place in the text where the illustrations are discussed. A serious flaw in a catalog is the appearance of illustrations that seem to float by themselves, with no caption and no explanation why they are there.

This raises the issue of grids. Ruari McLean says, “The grid is the invisible framework within which all books, magazines and newspapers are designed.”

While the basic unit of design for books is generally the two-page spread (seen in figures 1 and 2), the simplest grid is the full page, as for the setting of the prose of a novel. This is a one-unit grid. Exhibition catalogs, with their frequent use of illustrations, present many grid-related problems to designers. Since the number and size of the illustrations can vary considerably, it may be necessary for the designer to design each page individually. But the use of grids makes this task simpler. It may be determined that the text will always fall in certain places on

![Figure 1. One method for determining ideal margins on a two-page spread, regardless of the original shape of the page. This method is explained in detail by Jan Tschichold (see note 12).](image-url)
Figure 2. John Biggs shows a few ways to determine margins: “This is a pair of pages, each of which is in the proportion of the Golden Section. The type area is arrived at by first drawing diagonals. . . . The height of the page is divided into nine equal parts. A horizontal line is drawn across both pages at the first and seventh of the nine divisions. From where the first line cuts the diagonal a vertical is dropped to the seventh division. This horizontal cuts the diagonal to give the fore-edge margins” (see note 13).

a page, the illustrations in other designated spaces. Adjustments can be made for pictures that are larger or smaller than the one for which the grid has been designed. A good balance between illustration and text is desirable. Some catalogs have pictures taking up most of the page, followed by only a few lines of text. This may be acceptable occasionally, but not throughout the catalog. Too much illustration and too little text gives the catalog the look of a picture book and can create the impression that it is short on intellectual content.

One of the more important decisions facing a designer of an exhibition catalog relates to the choice of paper. Research on legibility has shown that glossy papers inhibit the speed and comprehension of readers (these are the two criteria that researchers have used to determine legibility). Also, the color of the paper is very important. Catalogs on green, pink, or yellow papers have been submitted to the RBMS Exhibition Catalogue Awards Committee. The paper alone is distracting, and the committee has usually eliminated them early in the judging process. The paper alone, of course, will not disqualify an entry, but any designer bold enough to use such a colored paper is likely to be unaware of the effects of such a choice, and thus would probably have also introduced other jarring design elements. The adage that first impressions are lasting ones does apply to catalog judging. Judges have difficulty overcoming the initial, negative response to the colors of a bright catalog. I should temper this by saying that some catalogs need to be on a brightly colored paper since the subject matter calls for it.

Voluminous research on legibility yields much about the use of different colors and sheens of papers. The most exhaustive studies, done by Paterson and Tinker,17 claim that glossy or dull paper stocks yield approximately the same legibility, but because of the “opinions and prejudices of the overwhelming majority of readers who believe that they can read material printed on dull finished paper more rapidly than material on glazed paper,” they recommend the use of dull-finished paper.18

As to be expected, most exhibition catalogs contain lists of the items on exhibit. If these lists are of books and pamphlets, broadsides, and other printed and nonprinted items, these entries will essentially form a bibliography. Just how much information the catalogs include will be dictated by a number of factors: space available, costs,
expertise of the compiler, and perhaps of primary importance the aims of the catalog with respect to its intended audience. If that audience is a general public, there is no need for quasi-facsimile transcriptions, signature collations, locations of copies, and other scholarly data. But if the catalog is seen as a reference tool for researchers in the field, then the amount of data it offers must reflect this purpose.

I would like to offer some ideas about the content and physical design of bibliographical entries, with a focus on their use in exhibition catalogs. Catalogs are not straight bibliographies, so a good deal of flexibility can be used in the design of the exhibition catalog page. Where a catalog can be a visual presentation in book(let) form of materials on display, a bibliography is a listing of source materials, and usually does not permit the attractive manipulation of visual matter suitable for an exhibition catalog. Nonetheless, if the catalog offers scholarly data to a serious audience, it must do so legibly and in a perceptibly logical way. That is, the information should be easy to read, and the intellectual content of the entries should be easy to grasp at a glance.

Some bibliographies use symbols or abbreviations to save space (for example, a dagger to indicate a first printing, a crosshatch to indicate a signed copy). But the more such shortcuts are used, the more the reader will have to memorize. If there are too many, and if they do not themselves carry some meaningful code to indicate what they mean (like C&W for Chatto & Windus), then the reader may need to refer constantly to a table at the beginning of the book, which impedes progress and can be annoying. My own dictum is: try to avoid all such shortcuts, or keep them to a minimum. A reader can learn three or four such abbreviations quickly; more than that is counter-productive.

Bibliographical entries should contain enough information about the items on display so that a reader can locate copies. The catalog should give, where appropriate and possible, author, title, and imprint data. The order of these elements will be determined by the practices in the field of study covered by the catalog. In the humanities, the order I mentioned above is generally followed, but in the sciences there are variations. There are style manuals for bibliographies in many fields, and the compiler should be familiar with the appropriate one. The rule of thumb is: once an order is adopted (preferably one with which the audience will be familiar), it should be followed consistently.

The order of the items cited in the catalog should be logical. A well-ordered catalog offers efficient intellectual access to materials. If the exhibition is well organized, then the entries can follow the order of items in it. But some exhibitions have a random arrangement, often because of space requirements. In such instances, the catalog may provide a useful organization. Since the catalog will exist long after the exhibition has been dismantled, the designer should strive to make the catalog a lasting contribution to the field.

The entries in the catalogs may contain other data fields in addition to author, title, and imprint. These may include, as appropriate, an edition statement, the number of
volumes in the set, series title, pagination, the book’s size, the existence of an index or bibliography, number of copies printed and the number of the copy on exhibit, price and availability, locations of copies, collation, provenance, and notes.

There are many other elements that go into page design and the production of the catalog. A designer must consider whether to have page numbers and where they should be placed (somewhere on the outer margins is best); how much leading (space between the lines) there should be; whether to use headlines (or footlines), and in what type size to print them; whether and how to number the items listed in the catalog; whether to have an index and how it should be designed; whether to use endnotes or footnotes; how much rule to use, where to use it, and if it should be decorative or plain; what other decorative treatments may be employed (such as fleurons, dingbats, or tailpieces); how many columns to print the text in; and what printing method would be best.

Binding materials should be appropriate to the size and weight of the text block, and the cover should be designed so as to appeal to the eye and cohere in spirit and objective with the intellectual content of the catalog.

**JUDGING CRITERIA USED BY THE RBMS EXHIBITION CATALOGUE AWARDS COMMITTEE**

When the RBMS Exhibition Catalogue Awards Committee was formed in 1985 to administer the Katharine Kyes Leab & Daniel J. Leab *American Book Prices Current* Exhibition Catalogue Awards, committee members drew up an evaluation form for their use. It contained a list of topics which they thought would form the bases for deciding what constituted good catalogs and less successful ones. A recent re-examination of the judgment criteria has produced a revised form which seeks to clarify what each category originally implied. The following comments are based on the revised form and reflect the committee’s focused thinking about the nature of exhibition catalogs. (See figure 3.)

The evaluation form divides the judging criteria into two areas: INTELLECTUAL CONTENT and DESIGN. Each of these categories is then subdivided; a last area on the evaluation form leaves room for Personal Observations and Comments.

The following comments, organized according to these categories, present the exhibition catalogs in the ideal world. Each one should be a model of perfection, in content and form. But in fact, time, money, and other obligations often come between the best-laid plans and the final product. These catalogs are produced by people who are busy in their jobs, preoccupied by the practicalities of human existence, and constrained by reduced budgets. The committee recognizes these limitations, and tries to reward institutions producing to the best of their abilities and resources. A case in point is the series of catalogs produced by the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, mostly done on personal computers with very low budgets. The production quality of these catalogs was not high enough to put them into competition.
for major awards; but over the first five years the Exhibition Catalogue Awards were
given, they all demonstrated “a consistently impressive scholarly achievement with
permanent reference value,” and in 1990 they received a special award of merit.

While the committee took this unusual step to award consistent, long-
term achievement, most catalogs of poor production quality are eliminated from
competition. The reason is that for little or no more money than is spent on a poorly
produced catalog, the producers can create an attractive pamphlet, simply but effectively
designed.

**Intellectual Content**

The first consideration is *Originality.* This implies that the subject matter of a catalog
is original or that it is dealt with in a fresh way, for example, a humorous or unusual
perspective. The old stand-by “treasures” catalog, then, is not original. However, in
at least two recent cases, treasures catalogs were submitted that were exceptional
examples of the genre and judged accordingly by the committee.

*Overall Informational Content*

The catalog should demonstrate that the topic was treated thoroughly and that the
work was done by experts. The catalogs should teach an audience something. If the
catalog could offer more but does not, this may not necessarily be a mark against it.
If its own intended purposes are met, it will fare well in this category.

*Contribution to Scholarship*

Sometimes a catalog has nothing to add to the world of letters; but what it does,
it does well. If this is the case, it should not suffer in the judging process. Often catalogs
are on subjects beyond the expertise of committee members. In these cases, the
committee members can evaluate what they have learned from the text. The quantity
and quality of the content can be seen. A bibliography or source notes may reveal that
a compiler or author has done scholarly work. Well-selected illustrations give the
reader a sense of the authority of the text.

*Bibliographical Description and Accuracy of Detail*

This category can cover very scholarly entries and simple author/title/imprint
listings, depending on audience and the aims of the compilers. Also, the exhibition may
contain many nonprint items, so “bibliographical description” may cover many
different formats. Accuracy of detail is often difficult to assess: how can a reader who
is not expert in a topic—and not looking at the exhibition—judge the accuracy of the
catalog’s contents? The reader should be able to get a sense of accuracy from the overall
text and production values of a catalog. Compilers and designers of exhibition catalogs
should try to communicate thoroughness, accuracy, and care in their productions by
creating an attractive physical object, well-written, with notes and bibliography perhaps.
Apparatus

Every catalog must provide information about its author, designer, printer, date, place of production, dates and title of the exhibition, and hosting institution(s). The catalog may also include information about typeface(s), paper(s), binder, number of copies printed, and advice on how to obtain additional copies. A table of contents and index are also useful in most catalogs, along with an acknowledgments page, a preface, and a bibliography. Many catalogs ignore some or most of these features, often to the detriment or frustration of the audience and committee members.

Organization and Presentation

The contents of a catalog should flow in a natural or logical order; writing should be clear and understandable; and the whole catalog should be easy to follow and congenial to a reader.

ACRL Rare Books and Manuscripts Section
Exhibition Catalogue Awards Committee

Catalogue Evaluation Form

[No point scale is provided since each of these 15 factors will weigh differently for each judge.]

Intellectual Content

1. Originality
2. Overall Informational Content
3. Contribution to Scholarship
4. Bibliographical Description and Accuracy of Detail
5. Apparatus
6. Organization and Presentation
7. Choice of Items
8. Illustrations (if appropriate)
9. Appropriateness to Intended Audience

Design

10. Originality
11. Appropriateness to Subject Matter
12. Effectiveness of Design
13. Typography
14. Production and Materials
15. Quality of Reproduction (if appropriate)

Personal Observations and Comments

Figure 3. A copy of the revised form now used by the RBMS Exhibition Catalogue Awards Committee, showing the criteria used in judging catalogs.
Choice of Items

Problems relating to this category may arise for the committee judges as well as for the compiler of a catalog. Should the published record contain everything in an exhibition? Everything in a collection from which the items in an exhibition were taken? If a reader knows of a significant work that should be part of an exhibition but does not appear in a catalog (or, presumably, in the exhibition), it is possible that it is absent because it is lacking in the institution’s collection. Since the Exhibition Catalogue Awards Committee cannot know what an institution has available for its exhibition, it is difficult to judge on the basis of “missing items.” On the other hand, an exhibition (and catalog) should suggest that the subject matter is being treated as thoroughly as the institution’s holdings permit. A recognition in a catalog’s text of what is not there may be useful. It shows the compiler’s awareness of the major works in a given field and lends authority to the exhibition and the catalog.

Illustrations

Illustrations need not always be present in an exhibition catalog, especially if the catalog is conceived as a handout to be used in conjunction with the exhibition. But if the catalog is to have a life of its own after the exhibition is dismantled, then illustrations may be quite important. Illustrations should not be used as superfluous graphics to break the monotony of the printed page; they should be demonstrably germane to the item they illuminate. The committee does take into account, however, the fact that illustrations are expensive, and some institutions cannot afford to print glossy or colored pictures in their catalogs.

Appropriateness to Intended Audience

This is one of the most important judgment categories. When catalogs are submitted to the Exhibition Catalogue Awards Committee, they must be accompanied by an entry form which asks for “Intended Audience” of the exhibition. This is one of the first pieces of information that the committee consults, for it will guide its thinking about almost all of the other evaluation categories. If an entry form states that a catalog is aimed at a general audience, it should be quickly discernible whether the text is over the heads of its readers. However, those who acquire a catalog will not have a copy of the filled-in entry form to tell them who the intended audience is. A catalog should be written and designed so that its primary audience will understand everything in it. The diction, sentence length, illustrations, grammatical complexities, specialized vocabulary, and overall content must be appropriate to the targeted audience of a catalog.

Design

This, the second area of evaluation, has to do with the physical features of a catalog. There are six sub-topics that the committee considers:
Originality

Catalogs that adopt a shape or feature somehow appropriate to their subject matter (e.g., a house, a see-through book, or a pop-up book) or use typography in a way suggestive of a catalog’s subject matter (the use of typical late-Victorian typefaces and page design on an art nouveau topic, for example) show such originality. The key here is that the design must relate to the subject matter of a catalog, and must not result in a poorly or inappropriately designed catalog whose design is a deterrent to reading and comprehension. If a design calls undue attention to itself and away from the text, if it detracts from one’s ability to concentrate on the text, or if it overshadows the content in any way, then the originality is inappropriate. Some catalogs submitted for the awards judging are remarkably original in design, but are so garish and carelessly thought out that their “originality” is considered a flaw by the committee.

Appropriateness to Subject Matter

A catalog could be produced whose design does not at all reflect the subject matter. For instance, a catalog for a children’s book exhibition may be bound in cloth-backed boards typical of a university press scholarly publication, looking not at all like a children’s book. But if the catalog is tastefully done, following classic design principles, it will be judged without the notion that a more “appropriate” design was possible.

Effectiveness of Design

Physical appeal is a key issue in the success of a catalog. It should not repulse a reader because of any inappropriate or garish use of page numbers, placement of text, typeface, margins, placement of footnotes, use of headlines or “footlines,” leading between lines, or any other visual elements. The designer must ask: does the design work in practical as well as aesthetic terms?

Typography

This category covers any element of the physical layout of the printed page. Little need be said beyond the now-familiar dictum: the less obtrusive the typography, the more successful a catalog will be at getting its message across.

Production and Materials

These criteria are often difficult to evaluate. The best one can do is observe whatever is visible, such as the use of stitching or staples, the number of staples, whether the catalog is perfect bound, the kind of paper (though an a priori investigation is often inadequate with respect to paper quality), the stiffness and appropriateness of the cover weight, and so on. The point of this category is that if the catalog was worth doing in the first place, it should have been done to endure, and its endurance is partly a function of the materials and methods of its manufacture.
Committee members give substantial weight to the evaluation of durability—how well the catalog will stand up to normal handling. Catalogs that do not even withstand the judging process are usually deemed too fragile for normal use.

Some catalogs have colophons that reveal what papers and typefaces were used, how many copies were produced, who executed the design and printing, the dates of production, and other such information. The inclusion of such data in colophons shows a pride in workmanship, demonstrating that all these things have been carefully thought out. The final product, even if it is produced with a small budget, can have the look, feel, and even smell of care in production.

**Quality of Reproduction**

If a catalog is illustrated, the images should be clearly printed on appropriate paper. Sometimes illustrations seem to be reproduced from fuzzy dark xerox copies or washed-out old photographs. Another problem the committee often sees is illustrations so reduced from the original that the content becomes illegible. The idea of having illustrations is to illustrate something—that is, to show the reader pictorially something which intelligently relates to an exhibition or to the text of a catalog. A blurry or tiny picture defeats that purpose.

Along with quality of illustration is the subsidiary consideration of captions. Sometimes illustrations have no captions and the reader must divine what the picture illustrates and how it fits into the catalog. The caption should not only identify what is depicted, it should give a source, and it should refer the reader to the place in the text at which the illustrated item is discussed. In addition, the text should have a note referring readers to relevant illustrations (e.g., “see figure 3”). Such cross-referencing is simple to do and quite helpful to the reader.

If a catalog has no illustrations, the reason for this should be explained somewhere. Since exhibitions are visual phenomena, a reader of an exhibition catalog will expect to see some pictures of what was in the accompanying exhibition. If there are none, the compiler of the catalog should explain why—even if the reason is that there was no money in the budget for illustrations.

Finally, the compilers and designers should see their creations as reference works, and as with any other reference tool, there should be an apparatus to allow the user maximum benefit from the catalog. There should be a clearly written, comprehensive introduction (even if it is only a single page), in which the purpose of a catalog is delineated, the sponsoring body or bodies are named, and the potential uses of the catalog are spelled out.

A bibliography should be designed in such a way that the organization of the entries and of the volume as a whole should be evident from a glance at a page or two. The same is true for an exhibition catalog. A reader who picks up and opens a catalog at random should comprehend the opening, and should have an idea of what has preceded and will follow those pages. Many exhibition catalogs lack tables of contents.
and indexes, but these are relatively easy and inexpensive to produce and are especially useful. Some catalogs using a specialized vocabulary would profit from a glossary (depending, of course, on the intended audience).

The aim of the designer should always be utility. The reader's convenience should be paramount and guide everything from the writing of the text to the placement of page numbers, the color of the ink to the weight of the paper and covers. A catalog will outlive its exhibition. How long it will do so will depend on whether it is made of enduring materials and whether people are drawn to it because of its content and aesthetics.

A well-designed and neatly printed catalog honors the collection from which it emanates and demonstrates the care its curators take in their holdings. It can bring valuable publicity to the collection and the institution which sponsored the exhibition, and can be used (as many institutions are using exhibition catalogs) as public relations tools. The care and extra expense put into a good exhibition catalog should pay its producers many benefits.

NOTES

3. One of the problems the Exhibition Catalogue Awards Committee members have had is with entries which really do not accompany an exhibition except by proximity or chronology. That is, they may be produced at the same time and place as the exhibition, but their contents have no relationship to the exhibition at all. For example, if the exhibition is of medieval manuscripts in a particular library but the catalog is essentially a biography of the founder of the library or a list of all the collections the library holds, then the catalog (even if it be published at the time of the exhibition and handed out to guests who come to see the books on display) has little to do with the exhibition. The committee has also seen publications that are bibliographies of libraries' holdings, while the exhibitions these catalogs accompanied had to do with only a small portion of those libraries' collections. If the catalog does not mention, depict, refer to, or even acknowledge the exhibition or any individual items in it, can the publication be considered an exhibition catalog? In most such instances, the publications are withdrawn from competition.

8. The catalog was by Gay Walker, *Eccentric Books* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988).

9. See Greer Allen’s discussion of this ingredient of catalog planning, pp. 80–81.


16. Readers face two pages at a time when a book is open, so designers must consider the two-page spread, not the single page. Anyone who designs a book one page at a time, or who designs a single page and tries to use that design for rectos and versos, not considering the two pages that readers see, will produce a distracting volume.

17. Donald G. Paterson and Miles A. Tinker authored individually or co-authored many articles and a book on legibility. *How to Make Type Readable: A Manual for Typographers, Printers and Advertisers* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1940) is much overlooked today, though it contains the results of thousands of hours of scientific testing. Some critics of the authors’ methods claim that the experience and good eye of a careful typographer/designer will produce beautiful, legible, useful books, without the designer’s having studied the scientific experiments. Tinker alone wrote *Bases for Effective Reading* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), a similar summary of many years of experiments. Herbert Spencer (*The Visible Word* [London: Lund Humphries in association with the Royal College of Art; New York: Hastings House, 1969]) calls Tinker “the most prolific writer on legibility research,” and Spencer cites 98 works by Tinker on the subject (22 of which are co-authored with A. Frandsen, 21 with Paterson).


20. Note about the Exhibition Catalogue Awards Committee Catalogue Evaluation Form: The previous form had a rating scale of one to five points for each of the categories. When the new form was designed, no point scale was deemed necessary since, as the note on the evaluation form indicates, each of the fifteen factors will weigh differently for each judge.
At the last meeting in which this form was discussed, individual members of the committee expressed interest in having the numerical rating reinstated on the form. It was decided that judges who found that practice useful could employ it on their own simply by adding the numbers to their own copies of the form.

Hence, the form for those using the numerical rating would look like this:

1. Originality
   1 2 3 4 5
2. Overall Informational Content
   1 2 3 4 5
3. Contribution to Scholarship
   1 2 3 4 5

When the first Exhibition Catalogue Awards Committee was established, the members used the old judging form, the new one of which I have discussed here. The rationales for each category and the bases of judgment were originally well delineated for the first committee, but their judging criteria were not passed down in written form. As the membership of the committee changed, so did the understandings of the members as to the meanings of the judging categories. To arrive at some consistency, not only for the judge but more importantly for the individual designers of and the institutions submitting catalogs, the committee decided to codify and publish its analysis of the judging form. The second half of the present article reflects the committee’s discussions about the explanations that I wrote up and presented to it in 1991. The original committee should be congratulated for its foresight and thoroughness, for the success of the ECAC program is a direct descendant of the hard work they did.


22. One of these “treasures” catalogs, however, was so outstanding that it easily won a prize: Legacies of Genius: A Celebration of Philadelphia Libraries, ed. by E. Wolf 2nd (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries, 1988). It was truly a monument of cooperation and intellectual prowess, for it listed in sumptuous fashion the many treasures that all these libraries were able to bring together in a wonderful and attractive exhibition. The catalog was the perfect accompaniment to the exhibition, and it will stand in its own right as a great reference book, in a way like the catalog done by the British Library for its influential exhibition Printing and the Mind of Man.

23. When I was compiling the 1991 list of submissions to the Exhibition Catalogue Awards judging contest, I spoke to many people who told me that they were sending their catalogs out to prospective donors as an example of the way they advertise their holdings, the way they honor donors, and the pride they have in their collections. One person noted that the catalog was produced for this reason.
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