

Activity 1B: Exhibition Design



Students visit a venue that is exhibiting works of art and/or media and apply what they have learned as they design their sections of the exhibition.

Sequence

1B.1: <i>Exhibition Visit</i>	Students visit a museum or gallery exhibition, observe how works are displayed, and share their observations about exhibition design.
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1B.2: <i>Designing Exhibition Sections</i>	Students work in curation teams to design their exhibitions, and use peer feedback to revise their designs.
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Materials Needed

- **Handout 4: Exhibition Observation Form**
- Students' diagrams of the exhibition space (or foam core scale models, if they made them in Activity 1A.3)
- Optional: 3-D modeling software, such as Google SketchUp
- Optional: Computers (one for each team)

1B.1: Exhibition Visit

1. Visit an exhibition.

Visit a gallery, museum, historical society, community center, or other venue that has an exhibition of works of art and/or media.

Note: If your class is unable to travel to an art exhibition, select examples of digital or online galleries and podcasts for a “virtual” visit. (See *Media & Resources* for suggestions.)

2. Have students complete the observation form at the exhibit.

Distribute **Handout 4: Exhibition Observation Form**. Have students spend several minutes quietly walking around the exhibition space, observing the works and how they are displayed. Have students complete their handouts.

Note: Handout 4 provides a good opportunity for formative assessment.

3. Share observations.

When you have returned to the classroom (or, if there is space, at the venue you’re visiting), have several students share insights from their observation forms.

4. Discuss exhibition design.

Discuss what students observed during this visit, as well as any other exhibitions they may have visited, using the following questions to prompt discussion:

- How do you think exhibition design influences the way you see a group of works?
- What impact does the spacing of works (whether 2-D works on a wall or 3-D works on the floor) have on the exhibition?
- What are some different strategies for sequencing works that you have observed? What do curators need to take into consideration when they sequence works?
- Based on what you’ve seen this semester, what are some different approaches to exhibition design? Which one(s) are you most drawn to, and why?



Teacher's Notes: Different Approaches to Exhibition Design

There are several different approaches to exhibition design that you can discuss with your students.

One of the most traditional approaches (which is sometimes challenged in contemporary art galleries and “alternative” spaces) is the “white cube” approach, where the work is hung in a pristine, empty space with white walls, the works are hung in a straight line on the walls, and usually there is some “breathing room” around each work.

Another approach is to hang work salon-style, with works hung in close proximity to one another at different levels on the walls.

With 3-D work, a traditional approach to exhibition design is to give each piece its own pedestal. Another approach is to place several pieces on one platform.

All of these approaches will have a different effect on the ways that viewers see the work—for example, viewers may pay more attention to each individual piece in a white cube setting, but may think more about the relationships among the works if they are hung salon-style.

You can also talk with students about different approaches to sequencing work. One approach (which probably won't work for this exhibition) is to hang works chronologically. Another approach is to hang similar-looking works (or works that address similar subjects) next to one another, or, conversely, to hang contrasting works together to highlight the differences among them.

These are all things your students should take into consideration as they begin to work on their exhibition design.

5. Discuss the principles of design.

Ask students the following question:

- How might you apply what you have learned throughout the course about the principles of design to your exhibition design?

Teacher's Notes: Applying the Principles of Design

There are numerous ways that students can apply what they have learned about the principles of design as they sequence their works and design the exhibition. For example:

- Students can apply the principle of *rhythm*—how can they set up a pleasing rhythm for the viewer?
- Students can apply the principle of *balance*—how can they create a balanced “composition” with the pieces they have chosen?
- Students can think about the principle of *contrast*—does it make sense to place contrasting works next to one another? How does that affect the way the works are viewed?
- Students can apply the principle of *unity*—how can they create a harmonious arrangement of all the pieces in the space?

Talking About Negative and Positive Space

Talk to students about how they can effectively use negative and positive space in their exhibition design—they may want to strive for a balance of negative and positive space and use the negative space around works to give each work “breathing room.” (However, if they are hanging their works salon-style, they may make less use of negative space.)

6. Assign Journal 2.

Have students complete Journal 2 as a homework or in-class assignment.

Note: Journal 2 provides a good opportunity for formative assessment.

Journal 2

Now that you have observed an exhibition space, take another look at the sketch you made of your section of the exhibition for Journal 1. Based on what you’ve learned about exhibition design, what might you change about your original design—the spacing of the works, the order they’re displayed in, something else? How are you making use of positive and negative space? Create a new and improved sketch of your exhibition design and be prepared to share it with your teammates.



Handout 4: Exhibition Observation Form

As you look at the exhibition of art and/or media works, complete this observation form.

Location of exhibition space	
Title of exhibition	
What kinds of works are in this exhibition (for example, paintings, photographs, sculptures, video)?	
What is the theme of the exhibition? How do you know this?	
What does the space itself look like? (For example, what color are the walls? How big is the space?)	
How are the works arranged in the space? (For example, "The works are arranged in a line on the wall, with equal amounts of space between each work.")	





<p>How much space is there between the different works? What impact does the space between works have on how you see the individual works?</p>	
<p>What do you notice about the sequencing of the works (that is, the order in which they are arranged on the wall or in the space)? (For example, are similar-looking works grouped together, or is there a contrast between works that are next to one another?)</p>	
<p>How does the sequencing of the work change or influence how you see the individual works?</p>	
<p>How do you think the exhibition design influences your overall experience with the works?</p>	
<p>If you could improve one thing about this exhibition, what would you change, and why?</p>	