Glossary

Museum Basics - T. Ambrose, C. Payne, p. 311-314

**Access Plan** A document that sets out what the barriers are that prevent people

gaining the maximum benefit from the museum, and how they can be avoided

or removed

**Animatronics** Models of people or animals that move mechanically

**Attractor** A place or facility to which tourist visitors are attracted.

**Brief** Written instructions for architect or designer, describing what is wanted.

Sometimes known as *Functional Brief* (because it describes how the museum or

gallery must function) or (in US English) *Functional Program.*

**Carers** People who look after children on a voluntary or professional basis. For

adults, the preferred term is personal assistant

**Case-for-support** A written statement of need used for fundraising purposes

**Conservator** A specialist in the scientific care and treatment of museum objects

and specimens. Conservators have a postgraduate training in a specialist field,

for example archaeological objects, natural history specimens, ceramics, oil paintings

or works of art on paper. Some conservators also have craft skills, for

example in cabinet-making. Conservators are also able to advise on the best

arrangements for caring for collections, and carry out treatment of objects that

reverses or slows down their deterioration. For this, they require a well-equipped

laboratory. *Conservator* in this museum sense should not be confused with other

uses of the term in English: for an architect who cares for historic buildings,

and for a biologist who cares for the natural environment.

**Dehumidifier** An item of equipment electrically operated designed to decrease

the level of relative humidity where environmental conditions are too damp

**Desk research** Information gathered from published and non-published sources

**Destination** A location at macro or micro level that attracts visitors

**Diffuser panel** A panel of translucent plastic or other similar material used to

diffuse or spread light from a light source. Diffuser panels are often used in

display cases to obtain a more even light for display purposes

**Diorama** A three-dimensional presentation technique consisting of scenes based

on models in the foreground and painted backgrounds or surrounds

**Director** The senior member of staff with overall responsibility for the museum’s

day-to-day operation, who reports to the museum’s governing body.

**Disaster Control Plan** A written plan that sets out the steps a museum should

take in preventing and reacting to disasters of all types

**Display** The means by which museums present and interpret objects to their

visitors, usually involving design, text and graphics. In the United States and

Canada the equivalent term is exhibit.

**Exhibit** The term used in the United States and Canada for the means by which

museums present and interpret objects to their visitors, usually involving design,

text and graphics. In British English, the equivalent term is display, while

‘exhibit’ means the object displayed.

**Exhibition** A temporary or short-term museum presentation.

**Formative evaluation** The techniques associated with testing the effectiveness

of displays and exhibitions in process of production

**Forward plan** A written management plan setting out the museum’s functional

and planning objectives to be met over a defined period of time

**Friends’ groups/Friends’ organisations or membership programmes** An organised

group of people who support the museum and its work generally

through fundraising and advocacy activities of different types

**Front-end evaluation** The techniques associated with the testing of ideas and

proposals for displays and exhibitions before production begins

**Governing body/Governors** Those people with overall responsibility in law for

conducting the policy and affairs of the museum, and to whom the museum

staff are accountable

**Heritage centre** A visitor facility providing interpretative displays on the cultural

and/or natural history of a place or area. ‘Heritage centres’ that hold collections

are functionally museums, although they may be called heritage centres

for marketing reasons

**Humidifier** An item of equipment electrically operated designed to increase the

level of relative humidity where environmental conditions are too dry

**Hygrometer** An item of equipment used to measure relative humidity

**Interpretation** Explaining an object, place or landscape and its significance

**Lux** A unit of illumination measured by a light meter

**Marketing** The techniques associated with developing and promoting the museum

to meet the identified needs of the market

**Marketing mix** A balance of factors – product, price, place and promotion –

which museums can control in order to influence people’s attitudes towards a

museum

**Market intelligence** Information about the market, including composition and

trends

**Marketplace** The specific social and economic context within which a museum

operates

**Market research** The study of the different habits, attitudes and interests of the

users making up the market for a museum

**Market segment** An identifiable range of users or non-users within the market

with shared characteristics

**Market share** The extent to which the museum attracts users in the overall

market

**Market survey** A programme of investigation into the structure and nature of

the market

**Market penetration** The degree to which a museum is successful in attracting

users from the market as a whole and from particular market segments and

encouraging take-up of services

**Micro-environment** A small space that can be controlled in terms of relative

humidity and other environmental factors for special categories of material

**Museum manager** Any member of staff with responsibility for managing resources

– people, collections, finance, buildings or equipment. It is used in this

book to show that many people in a museum contribute to its effective working.

**Museum product** An amalgam of the quantifiable and non-quantifiable factors

that go to make up the personality and identity of a museum in the mind of

the user

**Outreach** The methods by which a museum can take services out into the

community that it serves through, for example, touring exhibitions or School

Loan Services

**Pepper’s Ghost** A presentation technique based on mirrors that allows one image

to replace another

**Performance measurement** Measuring a museum’s or a person’s performance

against agreed objectives and standards

**Preventive conservation** The processes by which a museum’s collections are

stored, displayed, handled and maintained in ways which do not lead to deterioration

**Public relations** The management of the relationship between the public and

the museum

**Recording thermohygrographs or electronic hygrometers** An item of equipment

used for the continuous recording of temperature and relative humidity

levels on a weekly or monthly chart

**Relative humidity (RH)** Relative humidity is a ratio of water vapour in the air

to the amount that it can hold if fully saturated, and is expressed as a percentage,

for example 55 per cent RH

**Remedial conservation** The processes involved in repairing damage to collections,

using specialist conservation techniques that are reversible. The need

for remedial conservation is often due to poor collections management and

inadequate preventive conservation measures

**Service Level Agreement** A contract between a funding agency and a museum,

setting out what the museum will deliver in return for how much financial

support.

**Stakeholders** Those groups of people with a real interest in the museum.

Stakeholders will include funding bodies, sponsors, Friends, universities, government,

collectors’ groups etc. Some are more important than others!

**Tableau** A presentation technique consisting of a reconstructed setting with lifesize

models of people or animals

**Thesaurus** A list of agreed names, to ensure consistency in cataloguing objects.

A thesaurus usually provides synonyms, broader and narrower terms, and

‘preferred’ terms. Also known as ‘vocabulary’.

**UV-monitor** An item of equipment electrically operated that measures the

proportion of ultra-violet light falling on an object or display/storage area

**Visitor profile** The nature and demographic make-up of the museum’s visitors

**Volunteers’ organisation** An organised group of people who provide practical

support to museum staff on a voluntary basis

Museum Exhibition - D. Dean

**accession** the process of transferring title or ownership from the providing source (field work,

purchase, gift, transfer, etc.) to the museum

**acid-free** a term generally referring to either paper or paper-board that has been treated (buffered) or made from fibers free of organic acids

**acquisition** the act of gaining physical possession of an object, specimen, or sample

**acrylic paint** a term referring to a number of plastic, water-based paint products

**affective learning** learning based upon emotional response to stimuli; emotional learning

**angle iron** a metal construction material with a cross-section in the form of the letter “L”

**anodized metal** a metal which has been coated with another material through the process of

electrolysis

**application** software that allows the computer to perform specific tasks; software program

**appraisal** the assigning of a monetary value to an object

**architect’s rule or scale** a graduated device used to make scaled measurements

**artifact** an object, either two- or three-dimensional, that has been selected, altered, used, or made by human effort

**audience** all or a specially identified segment of a museum constituency

**audiovisual devices** machines that produce sound and images

**blockbuster** a term derived from the popular name of the huge German bombs used in World War II to blast large sections of a city; in the museum sense, it refers to a revolutionary, powerful exhibition

**board foot** a USA standard length measurement of sawn wood by which the purchase price is

figured

**box-in-a-box configuration** a frame of reference that views micro-environments as existing in and dependent upon their surrounding macroenvironments

**buffer** a material or condition interposed between two other materials or conditions to reduce or slow the interaction between them

**case furniture** structures used within cases, vitrines, or on bases that serve as supporting surfaces for objects/graphics

**cataloging** assigning an object to an established classification system and initiating a record of the nomenclature, provenance, number, and location of that object in the collection storage area

**ceiling grid** generally refers to the metal support structure for drop ceilings

**coating** paint, stain, or plaster used to finish a surface

**cognitive learning** knowledge based upon reasoned thought; rational learning

**collection** an identifiable selection of objects having some significant commonality

**collection manager** a person charged with the care of a particular collection, normally working under the direction of a curator

**collective medium** a particular means of expression used by more than one person in a collective effort, and for predetermined and agreed upon goals

**comfort** freedom from stress or the fear of failure

**communication** “the transfer of information and ideas with the deliberate intention to achieve

certain changes, deemed desirable by the sender, in the knowledge, opinions, attitudes and/or

behavior of the receiver *[sic]*”

**composite board** any material made of wood chips or sawdust bonded into sheets with adhesives; this includes materials such as particle board, chip board, and masonite

**concept-oriented exhibition** a presentation that is focused upon the transmission of information and in which collection objects may or may not be used to support the story rather than being the main emphasis

**conflict of interest** those acts or activities that may be construed to be contrary to ethical museum practices based on knowledge, experience, and contracts gained through conditions of employment

**conservation** the processes of preserving and protecting objects from loss, decay, damage, or other forms of deterioration

**conservator** a person with the appropriate scientific training to examine museum objects, work to prevent their deterioration, and provide the necessary treatment and repairs

**controlled environment** surroundings in which temperature, relative humidity, direct sunlight, pollution, and other atmospheric conditions are regulated

**coordinating activities** efforts aimed at keeping every task moving toward the same goal

**cove base** material used along the base of a wall

**cultural heritage** a tradition, habit, skill, art form, or institution that is passed from one generation to the next.

**cultural property** the material manifestation of the concepts, habits, skills, art, or institutions of a specific people in a defined period of time

**curator** a museum staff member or consultant who is a specialist in a particular field of study and who provides information, does research, and oversees the maintenance, use, and enhancement of collections

**cursor** an image on the computer monitor that indicates the location for information input or

activity

**deaccession** the process of removing objects from a museum’s collections

**deed of gift** a document with the signature of the donor transferring title of an object to a museum

**designer** a museum staff member or consultant who designs the exhibition, does working drawings, and coordinates fabrication and installation activities

**director** the person providing conceptual leadership of the museum and charged with the

respossibility for policy-making, funding, planning, organizing, staffing, supervising, and

coordinating activities through the staff; the director is also responsible for the professional

practices of the museum

**display** a presentation of objects for public view without significant interpretation added, relying solely upon the intrinsic merit of that which is presented. In the UK and Europe this word is used by choice instead of exhibition (q.v.)

**distributed materials** printed pamphlets, booklets, catalogs, gallery notes, and other materials that are distributed as part of the presentation of an exhibition

**dry mount** a method of bonding two surfaces together using heat-sensitive tissue and a heating instrument; normally used for mounting twodimensional objects such as photographs or drawings

**drywall** see “sheetrock”

**drywall screw** a specialized screw used for attaching sheetrock to the studs

**educator** a museum staff person or consultant who specializes in museum education and who

produces instructional materials, advises about educational content for exhibitions, and oversees the implementation of educational programs

**endowment** a funding process in which a stated part of a money gift (corpus) is held to generate income and only that income may be spent

**ethics** the process of establishing principles of right behavior that may serve as action guides for individuals or groups

**ethnic** used in the museum community as a nondiscriminatory term referring to a division or

group of people distinguishable by language, custom, or some special characteristic

**evaluation report** a document that sets down evaluation findings assessing an exhibition from the standpoints of meeting goals and successful development

**exhibit (noun)** a grouping of objects and interpretive materials that form a unit for presentation; the localized grouping of objects and interpretive materials that form a cohesive unit within a gallery

**exhibit (verb)** to present or expose to view, show, or display

**exhibit case** a closed, internally lit piece of exhibit furniture within which objects and/or graphics are exhibited

**exhibit panel** a vertical surface upon which objects/ graphics or support devices are attached for exhibit purposes, or for use as a spatial divider

**exhibition (noun)** a comprehensive grouping of all the elements (including exhibits and displays) that form a complete public presentation of collections and information for the public use; “An exhibition is a means of communication aiming at large groups of the public with the purpose of conveying information, ideas, and emotions relating to the material evidence of man and his surrounding, with the aid of chiefly visual and dimensional methods”

**exhibition (verb)** the act or fact of exhibiting collections, objects, or information to the public for the purpose of education, enlightenment, and enjoyment

**exhibition policy** a written document that states a museum’s philosophy and intent toward public exhibitions

**expansion joint** a joint between structural elements which employs a flexible separator that allows expansion and contraction of materials to occur without damage

**extermination** the acts of either preventing the invasion of harmful organisms or ridding a collection or collection items of an existing infestation through the use of chemical or mechanical means not considered dangerous to humans in the dosages needed to kill the pests

**fabrication** the work of creating the physical elements needed for the presentation of collection objects in an exhibition; the process of constructing props, preparing graphics, building cases, etc.

**facility** the physical components that comprise the buildings and grounds of an institution; the physical plant

**fire rating** a rating system developed to indicate the relative resistance a material has to burning through and its ability to prevent the spread of fire; usually measured in time units

**floppy disk** a portable, plastic disk coated with a material sensitive to magnetic fields that can be used to store information generated by a computer

**fluorescent lighting** light sources in which electric current is passed through gases in a glass tube causing them to fluoresce and produce illumination

**footcandle** a unit for measuring illumination equal to the amount of light reaching a surface 1 ft sq. produced by a candle 1 ft away

**FormicaR** a brand name that has become the generic term for numerous types of commercially produced, high-density plastic laminates

**framing** the method of creating a stable opening into which a window or doorway can be built

**fumigation** the use of a highly toxic chemical gas to kill any organisms existing in the target area or item; the chemicals utilized in fumigation are highly dangerous to humans and their use is controlled by law

**furring** the method of covering an I-beam or other construction element with another material to disguise it

**gallery** a room specifically designated for exhibitions

**gallery guides** a form of distributed material; written documents, usually brief and easy to carry, that are available for visitors to have and use to gain more information about an exhibition subject

**graphic** a two-dimensional depiction such as a photograph, painted design, drawing, silkscreen, etc. used to impart information, draw attention, or illustrate

**grout material** used to fill spaces between ceramic tiles

**historic site** a location with important historic connections usually relating to an important person or event

**HVAC** heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system

**hydrated salts** chemicals that are hydrophilic and can be used to control relative humidity in

enclosed spaces; among these are sodium chloride, zinc sulfate, magnesium nitrate, magnesium chloride, and lithium chloride

**hydrophilic substances** materials that readily absorb atmospheric water and are used as humidity buffers

**I-beam** a steel beam with a cross-section that is the shape of the letter “I”

**ICCROM** (International Center for the Study of the Preservation and the Restoration of Cultural Property): an intergovernmental organization created by UNESCO in 1969, whose statutory functions are to collect and disseminate documentation of scientific problems of

conservation; to promote research in this field; to provide advice on technical questions; and to assist in training technicians and raising the standard of restoration work.

**ICOM** (International Council of Museums): the international non-governmental organization of museum and professional museum workers established to advance the interests of museology and other disciplines concerned with museum management and operations.

**ICOM *Statutes*** adopted by the 16th General Assembly of ICOM in The Hague, 5 September,

1989, the ICOM *Statutes* describe and define the ICOM organization, its role, membership,

method, and objectives

**ICTOP** (International Committee for Training of Personnel): one of the standing committees of ICOM

**incandescent lighting** light sources in which an electric current causes a filament to glow or incandesce, producing illumination

**inert** products made of non-reactive, chemically balanced materials with special attention given to acidic neutrality

**infestation** a population of living organisms that exists in collections or collection items; the

organisms may be as large as rats and mice, or as small as moths or fungi

**infrared radiation** (IR): the part of the electromagnetic spectrum below visible light that

humans interpret as heat

**interactive** a device that invites and accommodates interaction between the viewer and itself

**interpretation** the act or process of explaining or clarifying, translating, or presenting a personal understanding about a subject or object

**inventory** an itemized list of the objects included in a museum’s collections

**label** a textual graphic that provides information

**latex paint** a term referring to a number of plastic, water-based paint products

**lathe** thin strips of material, generally wood, used to form a matrix over which some other material may be applied; for example, lathe might be used between a concrete wall and plywood panels, or a lathe matrix might be used on a ceiling before plaster is applied

**layout** a composition using graphic design elements placed in relation to each other

**leisure activities** activities that people engage in when they are not involved in a professional

pursuit

**lux** a unit of illumination equal to the illumination of a 1 m sq. surface uniformly 1 m away from a candle; equal to 5 footcandles

**macro-environments** the totality of the surrounding conditions and circumstances present in spaces generally room-size and larger

**management-oriented activities** tasks that focus on providing the resources and personnel needed to realize a product

**Maslow’s Hierarchy** a behavioral construction by Abraham H.Maslow that relates the sequential and consecutive nature of human needs to motivations

**masonry** refers to construction elements formed of brick, concrete blocks, or other similar materials

**mechanical** a term referring to any construction elements concerned with HVAC

**micro-environments** the totality of the surrounding conditions and circumstances present in small, often enclosed spaces

**mildew** microscopic fungi that attack organic materials that are exposed to high humidity and

dampness

**mission statement** a written document that states a museum’s institutional philosophy, scope, and responsibility

**model** a three-dimensional representation of an object or space usually using scaled

measurements

**mounting** the attachment of an object/graphic to a supporting surface; the device used to attach an object

**mud** thinned plaster used to fill cracks and seams in a plaster or drywall surface

**museology** the branch of knowledge concerned with the study of the theories, procedures, concepts, and organization of museums

**museum** a non-profit-making, permanent institution that is in the service of society and is open to the public; it acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment

**natural buffering** the interaction between collection objects and their surroundings in an enclosed space that reduces or slows fluctuations in relative humidity and temperature

**natural light** the light produced by the sun that penetrates the Earth’s atmosphere

**nomenclature** a system of names used to describe museum objects

**object file** a careful listing of all actions or activities impacting a particular object in the museum’s collections including all conservation, restoration, exhibition, loan, or other uses of the object

**object-oriented exhibition** a presentation of collection objects with a primary goal of

providing their exposure to public view with limited interpretation

**open storage** the practice of placing stored collections on public view without interpretation or planned educational content

**particulate matter** any materials capable of being airborne; dust

**patrimony** cultural property, both intellectual and real, passed from one generation to the next

**pattern recognition** a visual-mental process that seeks and recognizes familiar things or patterns

**pH-balanced** a neutral balance of acid and alkaline

**plate** the horizontal structural members in a wall (i.e., floor plate, header or top plate) to which the vertical members are attached

**plenum** the space above ceilings between floors or roofs

**Plexiglas** a brand name for formed, solid acrylic that has become a generic term used to refer to many commercially produced products; clear sheet acrylic is often used as a substitute for

glass

**plywood** a building material made of thin sheets of sawn wood, laminated with adhesives to form larger sheets

**pollutants** gases and airborne particulate matter usually resulting from combustion or venting of chemicals associated with human, industrial, or other activities

**preparation** arranging, attaching, supporting, and other such activities that prepare an object/

graphic for exhibit

**presentation** an oral communication of ideas using textual, graphic, and/or three-dimensional

representations as aids to understanding; specifically for exhibits, the presentation of the

design to the client for their consideration

**preventive conservation** collection care to minimize conditions that may cause damage

**product-oriented activities** exhibition development efforts concerned with collection objects and interpretive aims

**production** the combined activities of fabrication, preparation, facilities renovation, and installation of exhibitions

**project manager** a staff person who oversees the whole process of exhibition development by facilitating communication and assisting in providing resources, with the goal of seeing the project through to its predetermined objectives

**props** exhibit properties; those items such as case furniture, exhibit cases, vitrines, panels, etc. that serve as the environmental elements for the presentation of the exhibits

**psychrometer** a device for measuring relative humidity using the differences in the

measurements from dry- and wet-bulb thermometers in moving air

**PVA** (polyvinyl acetate): a thermoplastic with good aging characteristics sometimes used as a fixative or sealing agent

**100 percent rag** a term referring to the material content of paper or board indicating a fiber

composition other than wood—usually cotton or linen

**recording hygrothermograph** a device for measuring and recording on a paper chart both

temperature and humidity over time

**registrar** the person charged with registering objects accessioned into a museum’s collections, maintaining the registration records, and assigning the accession number

**registration** assigning a permanent number to an object entering a museum’s collections for the purpose of identification and collection management

**relic** a non-specific term used to describe things from the past, sometimes applied to ethnographic or historic objects

**RH** (relative humidity): the amount of water in a given volume of air compared to the amount of water vapor the same volume of air will hold at saturation (100 per cent RH) at a given temperature

**scale** a system of measurement ratios in which real world data are converted to fractional equivalents while retaining proportional relationships

**scaled drawing** a graphic representation using scaled measurements

**sheetrock** a construction material made of gypsum powder bonded with an adhesive and sandwiched between layers of paper; also known as gypboard or drywall

**silica gel** a commonly used hydrophilic substance composed of a silicon+oxygen bond, neutral toward other substances, that can be used to control relative humidity within closed containers

**specimen** an example of a particular class of objects normally used when referring to natural science collections

**strategic planning** sometimes called forward or long-range planning—the process integrates the physical, educational, fiscal, and personnel goals of the museum or a particular collection area

**stud wall** a wall construction method using vertical and horizontal members (wood or metal) over which a “skin” of paneling is applied

**study collection** objects collected and organized for research or instructional use rather than for exhibition

**sub-title** an intermediate level of written information graphic, usually larger in typesize than a text block, and used to differentiate or emphasize sub-groupings within an exhibition

**tactile exhibits** exhibits that are designed to be touched

**tamper-proof** requiring a specialized instrument to operate

**target audience** any sub-group within a population that can be identified by some common factor or factors, and that is specifically chosen as a group to be attracted

**text or text block** a written graphic that aids in the interpretation of groups of objects or exhibition sections

**thematic exhibitions** exhibitions based upon a connecting theme that directs the choice of collection objects and information content

**thermohygrometer** a device for measuring temperature and humidity levels

**tiles** finishing elements made from a variety of different materials and usually held in place with an adhesive; ceramic, vinyl, and acoustic are a few of the materials used

**title sign** a graphic, often combining both text and pictorial design elements, usually placed at the entry to a gallery to attract attention and to announce the title of the exhibition

**traffic flow** refers to the movement of people through a specified area, usually a gallery

**two-by-four** a USA standard for pre-cut wood which actually measures about 1¾ in. (4.45 cm) by 3¾ in. (9.52 cm)

**UBC** (universal building code): a standardized set of specifications used as requirements for materials and the design of buildings in the USA

**UNESCO** United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

**UNESCO Convention** this Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit

Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property aims to provide a process

among nations for regulating international trade in cultural property

**UV light** (ultraviolet light): the part of the electromagnetic spectrum immediately above the visible range; black light

**VALS** (Values and Lifestyles Segments): a generalized socio-economic structure by Arnold Mitchell that helps identify population segments, interests, and motivations by their collective values and lifestyles

**vinyl adhesive** glue used to adhere wallpapers and vinyl wall coverings to surfaces

**vitrine** a closed, externally lit piece of exhibit furniture, typically consisting of a base or pedestal with a clear enclosure for displaying objects/ graphics

**VLS** (visible light spectrum): those frequencies of the electromagnetic spectrum to which the human eye is visually sensitive; radiation that is perceived as light

**wayfinder** any visual, tactile, or auditory clues or devices that assist visitors in orienting themselves within a museum’s facilities and surroundings, inform the audience of their options, and help them locate destinations

**wet mount** the process of attaching a photograph or other flat object to a surface using water-based adhesives

**world view** an individual’s rational model of reality; one’s mental picture of the world consisting of facts, raw perceptual data, concepts, suppositions, theories, and generalizations