

let's talk EXHIBITING

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As our Society's Judging Chairman, I get an opportunity to view a lot of our national and regional exhibits in the shows I may attend each year. And, as both a judge and as an active exhibitor, I perforce try and keep up with the rules, regulations and trends that inform exhibiting (and judging) in Canada and in the United States. Without such active participation, I wonder how others manage to keep current with the changes that continue to occur around us.

I also worry that exhibiting is seen as something that only our most advanced collectors attempt. Given the size of our Society's membership, it is disconcerting to see such a small percentage of the membership in the exhibiting ranks. Certainly at any of our national shows, the majority of exhibits come from our senior ranks, and it is rare to find a novice exhibitor challenging the pack. We hear enough about those novices who have been burned by being told they were "doing it all wrong", and have then perhaps determined never to exhibit again. This is unfortunate both for those who choose to drop out and, in the long run, for our Society as well.

I think any collector can become an exhibitor, and gradually become better at it, through "practice, practice, and practice", and learning as one goes along. The urge to show off our material is often fundamental among collectors, and exhibiting is only a more organized form of the same "Show and Tell" many of us were subjected to in kindergarten or the early grades in schooling. I also think that most collectors, in showing their material, want to be rewarded, at least with some form of encouragement and support, and would like to feel their efforts have been appreciated and understood by their fellow collectors.

There are many opportunities to begin exhibiting, whether in clothesline presentations at the local club, or at the regional stamp shows in our larger centres. Exhibiting at the club level often begins with the preparation of a single page, and the conversation with one's fellow collectors about



why the material is interesting or important, or scarce. (In one of the local chapters I attend, most or all of our meetings consist almost entirely of round table "Show and Tell". Even the most reticent collector can be encouraged to talk about one's material in such a supportive forum.)

The feedback and any new information we receive through this effort may then lead to changes on the page, more material, and to additional pages. As we think about, and talk about, the material we have in our collections, a framework then emerges for how it could be shown, so that others have a greater chance to appreciate it. As well, as we become more confident in asking those who we know are judges about our material, the more our own ideas and decisions will emerge.

Part of our practice in learning to exhibit material from our collections is also the research and study we put into it, usually from the same philatelic references we use as collectors. The more we study our material in this way, and organize it and explain it, the easier it is to convey this same information in the write-up we put on our pages.

Beyond the organization we almost automatically place on our material as we begin to show it around lies the next step in choosing to organize it according to the rules and conventions of competitive exhibiting. These are neither as daunting, nor as obscure or arbitrary, as one may otherwise imagine. They are just the rules and guidelines by which we learn to play the game, and have evolved to be as inclusive as possible for the range of collectors and all possible exhibits.

I find that these rules and guidelines are often misunderstood (perhaps due to a mistaken belief they may stifle

personal expression and creativity), but should not discourage one from learning them. The sources to consult here are all published and generally freely available on the Web or in books, and are worth seeking out for the wealth of information they contain. To mention just a very few, they include:

APS Manual of Philatelic Judging (6th edition, revised 2012) The indispensable reference for exhibitors, it is available as a free download at <http://stamps.org/userfiles/file/judges/JudgingManual.pdf>. Intended for exhibitors, both new and potential, (and judges, of course) it includes sections on all the exhibiting Classes and Divisions, including the new Illustrated Mail and Cinderella divisions. It shows how exhibits are evaluated at national level shows in the US and Canada.

American Philatelic Association of Philatelic Exhibitors (AAPE) <http://www.aape.org>. Not only can you read for free on this site almost every back issue of their quarterly journal, The Philatelic Exhibitor, with its range of important articles, the site includes a PowerPoint presentation, "How to Create a Philatelic Exhibit" available as a download, which covers the current rules and guidelines in comprehensive detail with actual examples illustrated. As well, there are other articles on Title Page and Synopsis Page preparation, on how to exhibit picture post cards, and an archive of a wide range of successful exhibits. Spending a few hours on this site pays back dividends in spades. If this site whets your appetite, please consider joining the AAPE, (currently \$26/yr for Canadian

and US members) to support their effort to make the rules of exhibiting more available to more collectors.

Van den Bold, W. Handbook of Thematic Philately (1995) Available, at reasonable cost, at http://www.philbansner.com/philatelic_literature/. If you want to become a thematic/topical exhibitor, this still-available book will show you the intricacies of modern thematic exhibiting. Its discussion on "philatelic elements", so necessary for thematics, but often misunderstood by beginning thematicists, is particularly useful.

Some careful reading of these "how to" publications begins to acquaint one with the framework behind competitive exhibiting. Yes, the framework is both complex and subtle, and may take some time to learn and feel comfortable about, but the framework has evolved over time to be more user-friendly and to level the playing field among a greater number of collectors. And a careful reading of such available sources will start to clarify rules and expectations behind crafting our exhibits. In the end, we may decide to take the plunge and begin the first steps to becoming exhibitors. I hope more of us choose to do so, as it really can be quite rewarding personally. It may also strengthen our Society as more and more exhibits are created and shown at stamp shows, and as more members of the public thus become more informed about our hobby. *

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