Preparing a Synopsis

In addition to a Title Page, most exhibitions now expect exhibitors to also submit a Synopsis when applying to show their exhibit. A Synopsis consists of no more than two additional pages, but is not shown with the exhibit on the floor. Instead, they are “notes” that the exhibitor prepares to educate the judges about what the exhibit contains.

Synopses are sent by the show committee a few weeks in advance to the judges, and are meant to aid them in their preparation for judging your exhibit. It can be used to great effect to guide them in their understanding of your intent, developing an “expectancy set” for what they should expect to see when they finally view it in the frames at the show.

A well-crafted Synopsis is meant to engage the judges in understanding exactly what you are intending to show. It is different than a Title Page, as you have much greater scope to convince the judges from what you are showing merits their greatest consideration. Its impact can be measured by how well you make them aware of your intent and of exactly what the story of your exhibit entails.

Your Synopsis should “look and feel” different than your Title Page. Whereas the audience for your Title Page is both the interested viewer and the judges, the audience for the Synopsis is exclusively the judges. Consequently, you may wish to write the two quite differently, and emphasize different things in the Synopsis than you have in the Title Page.

One way to slant your writing for the Synopsis is to include titles and sections that correspond to the criteria by which exhibits are judged. That is, the Judging Exhibit Evaluation Form (commonly called the “Universal Exhibit Evaluation Form” (UEEF) in the United States) is organized into major areas of Treatment, Importance, Philatelic/Subject Knowledge, Personal Study and Research, Rarity, and Condition. By explicitly writing sections of your Synopsis to correspond to these judging criteria you are demonstrating how your exhibit should be considered against each of these criteria.

The Synopsis is the place to “toot your own horn” and impress the judges. Don’t be afraid to state in your Synopsis why your exhibit material is important. If you have been studying the area for many years, say so. If you are using primary research well outside the normal philatelic literature for your topic, say so (and indicate a few references). If you have only the finest known material, say so. If you have particularly scarce or important material, include a short list of your most important pieces. If you have material that, even of moderate value, is most difficult to acquire, say so. In these ways, the emphasis is on the philatelic importance of what you are showing, foreshadowing what the judges will see, and demonstrating you know your stuff.

Your Synopsis should also clearly state what TYPE of exhibit you are showing (i.e., traditional, postal history, thematic, revenue, etc.), how it is organized, and why you have organized it the way you have. In most cases, you probably know your area better than most judges. Don’t expect them to be the experts; instead, write the Synopsis in order to give them a reasonable background with which to form initial impressions of your exhibit.

Finally, if you want your Synopsis to stand out, consider formatting it in any way that you feel may make it more visually attractive. Too often Synopses consist of long paragraphs of closely spaced text, with little use of white space or of colour. Try instead to break up your text into more manageable paragraphs, add the odd section title, or use font sizes to effect. The most visually effective Synopses I have seen all look more like small specialized brochures than pages otherwise from a manuscript. If you feel comfortable with the principles of desktop publishing or of graphic design, here is your chance to experiment, use some of the templates that often come with our software, get creative, and have some fun.

The small Synopsis illustrated with this article shows one approach to creating a Synopsis. Note that it has several sections each with a title (i.e., “Purpose”, “Scope”, “Organization and Treatment”, “Challenge”, “Significant Items”, “Knowledge, Personal Study and Research”, “Condition”, “Presentation”, etc.), and the use of columnar format to increase readability.

As well, covers to outpost towns are correspondingly more difficult to acquire than covers to St. John’s. This exhibit also includes a significant number of outbreak destinations.

The greatest challenges in Newfoundland postal rates were in the rates charged for non-first-class letters (e.g., circulars) and special complimentary rates (e.g., soldier’s and seamen’s mail). Although this is not a rate exhibit, some of these rates are nevertheless included to enhance the exhibit, and are highlighted accordingly. When known, the provenance of such covers have been indicated.

The greatest challenges have also been determined to illustrate some of the lesser-known mail routes by which mail was occasionally conveyed off-island, as some routes were of only temporary existence or shorter contracted duration. As well, mail to St. Pierre and Miquelon is particularly difficult to find as the market for it extends beyond those interested in only TNA material. Both of these topics receive coverage in this exhibit.

Significant Items

To exist, contains the following philatelic and significant challenging items:

- St. John’s to Egmont, 1875. Only known regularly printed milestone cover with the “sufficient” marking at the Desbarats postmark.
- St. John’s to Egmont, 1877. Only known regularly printed milestone cover with the “sufficient” marking and the Desbarats postmark.
- St. John’s to Egmont, 1879. Only known regularly printed milestone cover with the “sufficient” marking and the Desbarats postmark.
- St. John’s to Egmont, 1881. Only known regularly printed milestone cover with the “sufficient” marking and the Desbarats postmark.
- St. John’s to Egmont, 1883. Only known regularly printed milestone cover with the “sufficient” marking and the Desbarats postmark.
- St. John’s to Egmont, 1885. Only known regularly printed milestone cover with the “sufficient” marking and the Desbarats postmark.
- St. John’s to Egmont, 1887. Only known regularly printed milestone cover with the “sufficient” marking and the Desbarats postmark.
- St. John’s to Egmont, 1889. Only known regularly printed milestone cover with the “sufficient” marking and the Desbarats postmark.
- St. John’s to Egmont, 1891. Only known regularly printed milestone cover with the “sufficient” marking and the Desbarats postmark.
- St. John’s to Egmont, 1893. Only known regularly printed milestone cover with the “sufficient” marking and the Desbarats postmark.
- St. John’s to Egmont, 1895. Only known regularly printed milestone cover with the “sufficient” marking and the Desbarats postmark.