

Made You Look!: How to Select Visuals that Will Keep Visitors Engaged with Your Exhibits

Resource Guide

Resources on Accessible Design

Color Contrast Checker (<http://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/>): check the contrast between your text (foreground) color and background color by inputting color values. Results tell you whether you “pass” for both large and small type.

Lighthouse Guild, “Effective Color Contrast: Designing for People with Partial Sight and Color Deficiencies,” and “Making Text Legible: Designing for People with Partial Sight,” (<https://www.lighthouseguild.org/healthcare-professionals/elearning/low-vision-resources/effective-color-contrast-and-making-text-legible/>)

National Park Service, *Programmatic Accessibility Guidelines for National Park Service Interpretive Media*, updated May 2017 (<https://www.nps.gov/features/hfc/guidelines/>)

Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Exhibition Design, especially Chapter 3, “Label Design and Text” (https://www.sifacilities.si.edu/ae_center/pdf/Accessible-Exhibition-Design.pdf)

Resources for Planning and Design

<http://www.dafontfree.net>: downloads of all types of fonts, free licenses for non-commercial uses

Library of Congress, “Strategies for Planning and Selecting Maps for Exhibits, Displays and Workshops,” (<https://blogs.loc.gov/teachers/2020/05/strategies-for-planning-and-selecting-maps-for-exhibits-displays-and-workshops/>)

PicMonkey (<http://www.picmonkey.com>): free web-based photo editing, good for touching up modern images.



Printing and Scanning DPI Calculator (<http://www.scantips.com/calc.html>): about 2/3 of the way down the page; enter your print size (the dimensions you want to print at) and input size (dimensions of the original); click “calculate scan resolution” and calculator will tell you what dpi to scan your original at (e.g., “requires the Scanning Resolution of 480 dpi”).

Resources on Copyright and Reproduction

American Alliance of Museums, “Copyright and Intellectual Property Resource Page,” <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/resource-library/collections-stewardship-resources/copyright-and-intellectual-property/> (if you do not have an AAM membership, THC Museum Services can help you access these resources)

Association of Art Museum Directors, *Guidelines for the Use of Copyrighted Materials and Works of Art by Art Museums*, last updated October 11, 2017.

College Art Association, *Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for the Visual Arts*, February 2015.

Hirtle, Peter B. “Copyright Term and the Public Domain in the United States,” Cornell University Copyright Information Center, last updated on January 24, 2020.

(<https://copyright.cornell.edu/publicdomain>)

Hirtle, Peter B., et al. *Copyright & Cultural Institutions: Guidelines for Digitization for U.S. Libraries, Archives & Museums* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Library, 2009).

Kerr, Nathan and Anne Young. “TECH TUTORIAL: Digital Copyright and Piracy (Beginners),” Handout from the American Alliance of Museums Annual Meeting & Expo 2014.

University of Minnesota Libraries Copyright Services, “Using Copyrightable Materials,” (<https://www.lib.umn.edu/copyright/useoverview>) (See especially the “Thinking Through Fair Use” worksheet)



Smithsonian





[Print](#) [Subscribe](#) [Share/Save](#)

Strategies for Planning and Selecting Maps for Exhibits, Displays and Workshops

May 21, 2020 by [Danna Bell](#)

We thank our colleague Kathy Hart, Head of the Research Access and Collection Development Section in the Geography and Map Division at the Library of Congress for this post, which was originally published on the [Worlds Revealed](#) ([//blogs.loc.gov/maps?loclr=blogtea](#)) blog. Many of the considerations and strategies described in this post also pertain to selecting maps for use with students. Find additional teaching ideas in these [additional posts](#) ([//blogs.loc.gov/teachers/?s=maps](#)) about teaching with maps; to focus student engagement and thinking, select questions from the [Analyzing Maps](#) ([//www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html?loclr=blogtea](#)) Teacher's Guide.

Libraries and museums often feature maps and related geographic content in digital and analog, large or small exhibits, displays and workshops. When considering the variety of materials available, how does one select the material that will best inform and inspire the visitor? The following are some factors to consider.

The primary factors are the place, theme and time period

Geographic location

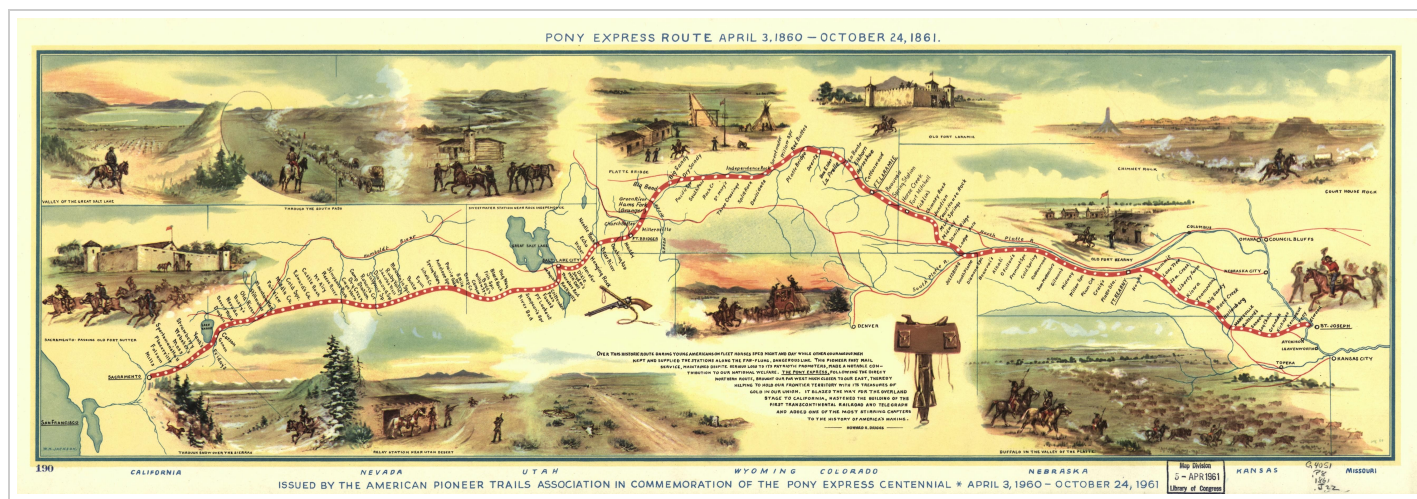
All maps (except for imaginary places) represent a place on the earth. Many exhibits will have a specific geographic theme or focus, and for those, the starting point for map selection is fairly straightforward. If the display is focusing on a small geographic area such as a city, it may also be helpful to consider including maps showing a broader perspective, such as a state or country map, to give context to the place.

Theme

For some exhibits, a topical theme is the primary focus. In those cases, the place may be irrelevant, and thus, a selection of a variety of places (such as different cities or countries, etc.) is suggested. This variety will help connect your resources to your audience.

Time period

All maps represent a place at a given time. However, as with the place, the time period may or may not be critical to your selection decisions. If time period is not a factor, a selection of various time periods may enhance the exhibit or workshop. The date or time period of modern maps is shown in a copyright or other date information printed on the map itself. Older, historic maps will not always include a date of production, but an estimated date will be given in the catalog record. Some maps are created to represent a time period in the past (called a 'date of situation'). These are 'historical' maps, as distinguished from 'historic' maps, the latter being produced contemporaneously in the past. To represent change over time, multiple similar maps, with differing dates, should be selected. Worth noting is that place names and boundaries change over time and are an interesting discussion point to promote comprehension.



(<https://www.loc.gov/item/2004629238/?locIdr=blogtea>)

This map is an example of a historical map. While it is portraying the time period of 1860, it was produced 100 years later in 1960. *Pony express route April 3, 1860 – October 24, 1861*. Map by American Pioneer Trails Association, 1960. Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress.

Other factors are also important to your selection consideration

Visual interest and readability

The selected maps should be understandable, readable, and generally visually interesting. Consider the lettering or font style, use of color, understandable legend, and other aesthetic aspects. These aspects are often in the eye of the beholder, however, are important considerations which support the understanding and comprehension, particularly with a young or general audience.

Language

While English is typically the default for a general interest display, exhibit or workshop in the U.S., it is important to remember that maps are produced in numerous countries and languages. Libraries or museums with extensive collections, such as the Geography & Map Division, contain a wide range of non-English language maps. Depending on the selected theme, geographic location, intended audience as well as the goals of the exhibit/workshop, a broad selection of maps in languages other than English may extend the appeal, and particularly connect with international visitors. Separately, another factor to consider is that the language may also present a nationalistic bias which should be considered in the selection decision.

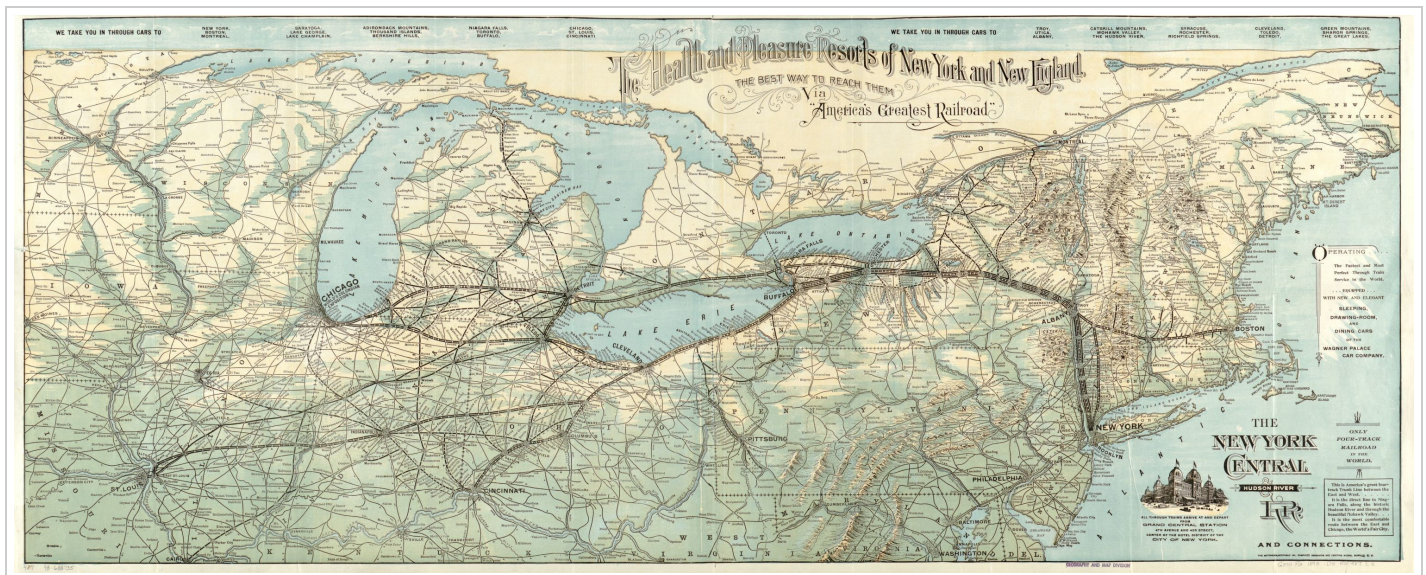


(<https://www.loc.gov/item/gm71005059/?locId=blogtea>)

江海全圖/Man ling biao Jiang hai quan tu [Complete map of rivers and coastline]. Created between 1812 and 1843. Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress.

Bias / perspective

Maps represent a point of view of the cartographer, publisher, or person/organization that commissioned the survey or mapping. The mapping agency or cartographer has a certain perspective that guides the creation of the map. They can create content that supports their intended message, whether to establish land claims, encourage business to relocate to a city, highlight environmental impacts, or numerous other reasons. For example, maps made by individual railroad companies in the 19th century, such as the one seen below, were highly propagandist. On the other hand, not every detail can be presented on a map, so mapmakers have to determine which concepts to include and which to omit. Depending on their goal and intended audience, there may be significant omissions. It is useful when selecting maps to exhibit to consider if the absence of specific details are problematic or contrary to the goals of the display/exhibit.



[\(/www.loc.gov/item/98688735/?locId=blogtea\)](https://www.loc.gov/item/98688735/?locId=blogtea)

The New York Central & Hudson River R.R. and connections. Map by New York Central and Hudson River Railroad Company, 1893. Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress.

Data sources / data generalization

The subject matter shown, particularly on scientific maps, are based on numerous data points, and as such, have to be classified and generalized into some number of categories. For example, rainfall data may be collected by the minute or hour, however, the cartographer would decide, based on the intent of the map, if the data should be presented as hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, or annually, or some other configuration. Another example is the difference in maps showing presidential election results by county compared to ones adjusted for population. The arrangement of data influences how the information is perceived and understood.

Projection

Map projection is the mathematical conversion necessary to convert a 3D sphere into a 2D flat plane. Some map projections are better for larger, small, or other areas, however, map makers select a projection which will minimize distortion in one of four factors: land shape, distance, direction, or area. As an example, for a map of the world, with the commonly used Mercator projection where the lines of longitude and latitude are straight, Greenland, for example, will appear very large. By comparison, the Robinson projection uses curved lines of longitude, and better retains the overall shape and size of the continents on a world map. The [USGS has a chart \(https://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/70047422/report.pdf?locId=blogmap\)](https://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/70047422/report.pdf?locId=blogmap) which describes the various projections. While consideration of projection is a minor factor in displays, the inclusion of maps with a unique or different projection provides an interesting variation and could increase the audience's interest and understanding.



(<https://www.loc.gov/item/2019360485/?locid=blogtea>)

This Italian map has both visual interest and an unusual circular south polar projection surrounded by a ring showing the mountains of the world, a ring showing constellations, and six female figures representing times of the day. *Nuovo planisferio cosmografico orografico universale ed orologio mondiale per uso di generale istruzione*. Map by Ignazio Villa, 1858. Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress.

Scale

The scale of the map reflects the ratio of the distance of the earth to that which is shown on the map. The scale is the

extent that the map is “zoomed in” or “zoomed out.” The scale may be noted textually, with a fraction, or graphically (a bar) on the map itself and will be stated in the catalog. A large scale map will show a city, county or other smaller area and may include many details. For example, a USGS topographic map has a scale of 1:24,000, which means that one inch on the map is equal to 24,000 inches in the real world. By contrast, a small scale map may show the world, a continent, or a large nation, for example, “Scale 1:30,000,000. 1 cm. = approx. 300 km. (186 miles).” The small scale map will provide fewer details and those will be generalized. In selecting maps, a consideration of scale should be based on the level of detail to show.



([//www.loc.gov/item/2018588018/?locrl=blogtea](https://www.loc.gov/item/2018588018/?locrl=blogtea))

This map includes three different scale bars to account for the difference in methods of measurement by separate countries. A *topographical map describing the principality of the islands of Malta and Goza*. Map by William Faden, 1799. Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress.

Other cartographic formats

Beyond print maps, globes and atlases are common and are important formats which convey geographic information and range in subject, time period, and language. When combined with print maps, or alone, they can greatly support the instructional objectives of the exhibit or workshop. Cartographic resources can also be found on [cloth](https://www.loc.gov/item/2006629341/?locrl=blogtea) (<https://www.loc.gov/item/2006629341/?locrl=blogtea>), [wood](https://www.loc.gov/item/2010586180/?locrl=blogtea) (<https://www.loc.gov/item/2010586180/?locrl=blogtea>), [plastic](https://www.loc.gov/item/2008628434/?locrl=blogtea) (<https://www.loc.gov/item/2008628434/?locrl=blogtea>), [puzzles](https://www.loc.gov/maps/?q=puzzles&locrl=blogtea) (<https://www.loc.gov/maps/?q=puzzles&locrl=blogtea>), [playing cards](https://lccn.loc.gov/90682989?locrl=blogtea) (<https://lccn.loc.gov/90682989?locrl=blogtea>), [Japanese scrolls](https://www.loc.gov/item/2002531180/?locrl=blogtea) (<https://www.loc.gov/item/2002531180/?locrl=blogtea>), and many other forms, all of which are included in the Geography & Map Division's extensive collections.

Posted in: [Geography and Maps](#)

[Add a Comment »](#)

Disclaimer

This blog does not represent official Library of Congress communications.

Links to external Internet sites on Library of Congress Web pages do not constitute the Library's endorsement of the content of their Web sites or of their policies or products. Please read our [Standard Disclaimer](#).