TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
real places telling real stories

Selecting Strong Visuals for Exhibits

Presenter: Erin McClelland   June 22, 2017

Exhibitions are a Visual Medium

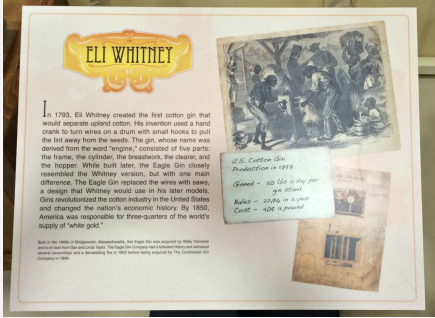*"The World at War, 1914 – 1918," Harry Ransom Center, Austin, TX*

Exhibitions of All Kinds are Visual Media

"Enemy Aliens, Prisoners of War," Banff National Park, Alberta, Canada

Exhibitions of All Kinds are Visual Media

Bayer Museum of Agriculture, Lubbock, TX

Audience Expectations

Visual Variety

The 'Munitionettes'
By 1916 Charles Burrell & Sons employed 150 women to produce munitions such as shells.
The work was very dangerous and the hours were long.
The Thetford 'Munitionettes' produced over 50,000 shells.

Ancient House Museum of Thetford Life, Thetford, England

Visual Variety

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

THE WAR AT HOME

YORK AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

World War I traveling Exhibit, Explore York Libraries and Archives, York, England

Choosing the Right Type of Visual

Step 1: Figure out what it is you're trying to communicate.

Step 2: Figure out which type of visual will best communicate that.

Step 3: Assess the quality of your options.

Step 4: Choose your visual.

Maps

The Basics

- Need to be reproduced at a scale large enough that people can see what it is you're interpreting.

- If necessary, it's okay to reproduce just a segment of a map.

Maps

Historical maps are good for giving people a snapshot of what a particular place looked like at a given time.

"Bird's Eye View of the City of Austin," by Augustus Koch, 1873, from Texas Bird's-Eye Views, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, TX

Maps

When historical maps are used together, they can also be used to show growth and change over time.

"Bird's Eye View of the City of Austin," by Augustus Koch, 1887, from Texas Bird's-Eye Views, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, TX

Charts, Graphs, and Tables

When historical maps are used together, they can also be used to show growth and change over time.

Battleship TEXAS State Historic Site, La Porte, TX

Images of Documents

"The Irish in World War I", County Museum Dundalk, Ireland

Images of Documents
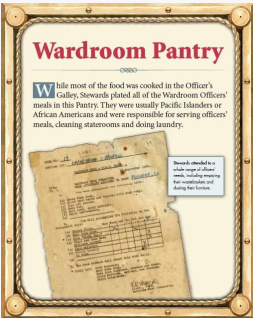
Waves of Hope: Asian American History in Austin, Asian American Resource Center, Austin, TX

Images of Documents

Wardroom Pantry

W hile most of the food was cooked in the Officer's Galley, Stewards plated all of the Wardroom Officers' meals in this Pantry. They were usually Pacific Islanders or African Americans and were responsible for serving officers' meals, cleaning staterooms and doing laundry.

Battleship TEXAS State Historic Site, La Porte, TX
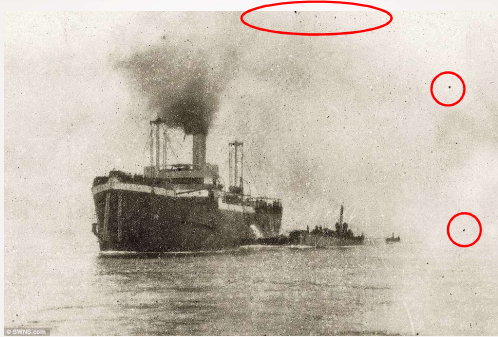
Photographs: The Basics

Donald Schoolhouse Museum, Grapevine, TX

Photographs: The Basics

! Photographs: The Basics

! Photographs: Simple is Strong

Bibliotheque nationale de France
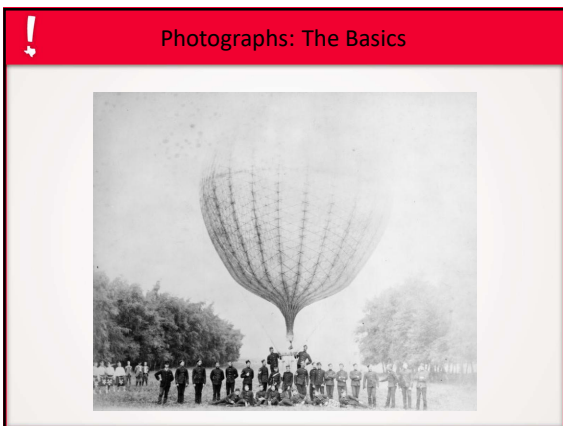
! Photographs: The "Rule" of Thirds
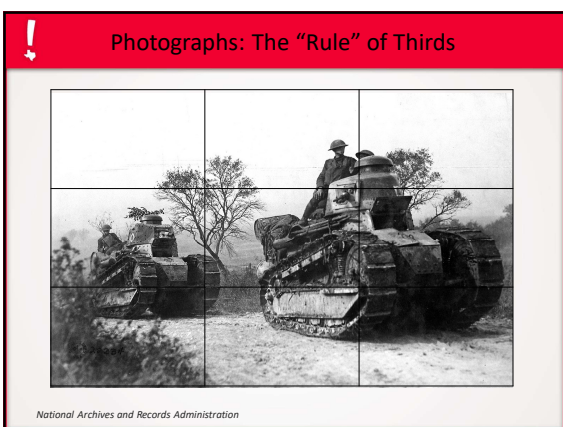
National Archives and Records Administration

Photographs: The "Rule" of Thirds
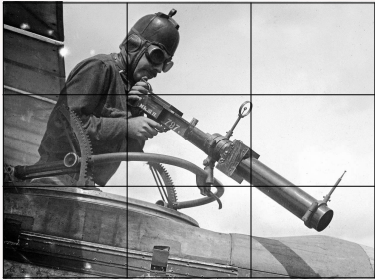
Photographs: The "Rule" of Thirds
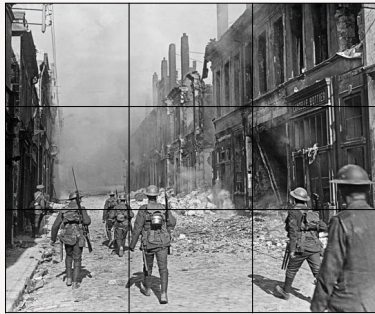
Photographs: Lines and Movement
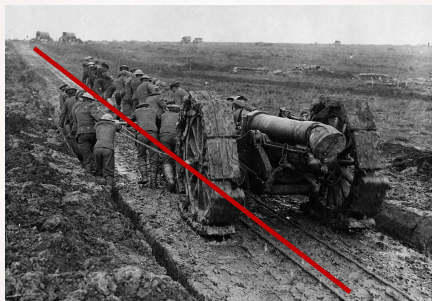
National Library of Scotland

Photographs: Lines and Movement
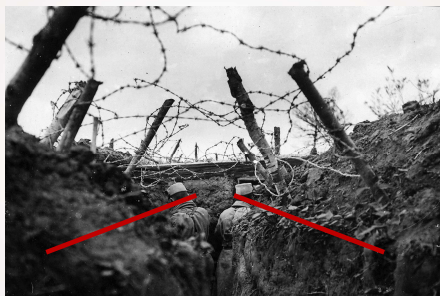
Bibliotheque nationale de France

Photographs: The "Rule" of Thirds

National Library of Scotland

Photographs: Action Images

National Library of Scotland

! Photographs: Action Images

Honourable Artillery Company, 2nd Battalion, in front of the Tower of London, ca.1915

! Photographs: Static Images

Mail Call, Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, at Grapevine CVB, Grapevine, TX
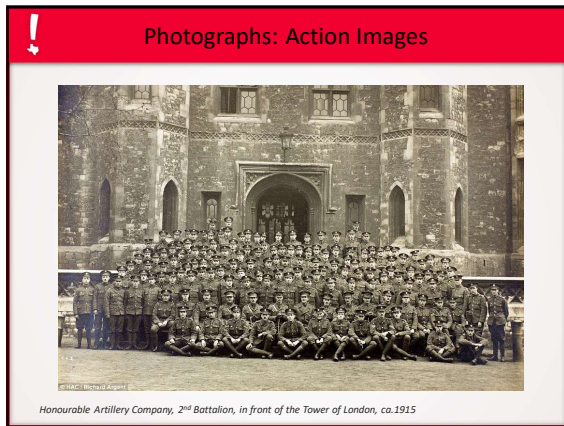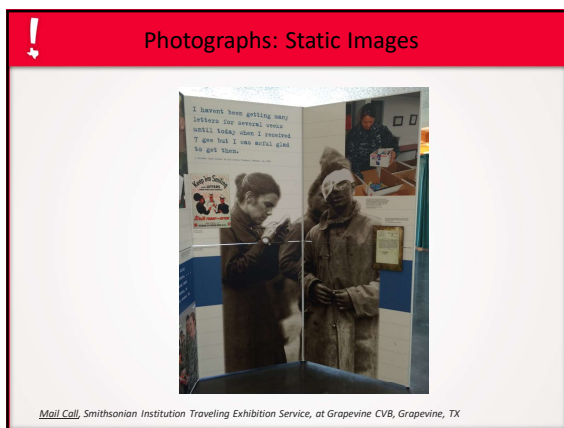
! Fonts: Serif vs. Sans Serif

Serif
- Serifs have "feet" or "tails" on the letters.
- Examples:
  - Garamond
  - Times New Roman
  - Bookman Old Style

Sans Serif
- Sans serif fonts lack the "feet" or "tails" on the letters.
- Examples:
  - **Franklin Gothic**
  - Tahoma
  - Arial

Fonts: Print vs. Web

Print

- Serif fonts are considered more legible in print.
- In general, use serif fonts for body copy and larger.
- Exception: serif fonts are harder to read at small size. Use sans serif fonts for smaller print (e.g., captions).

Web

- Sans serif fonts are considered more legible on screen.
- Use sans serif fonts at any size.

Fonts: Sizes

- Captions: 20 to 24-point type
- Body copy and Titles: 28 to 42-point type, depending on:
  - color of type
  - spacing between letters (kerning) and between lines (leading)
  - type of font (regular, bold, italic)

Note: the actual print size of a 20-point font will vary depending on the font. For example:

- *Kelvinized at 20 point*
- Microsoft Himalaya at 20 point

When using a font that runs on the smaller side, make sure you compensate for this by using it at a larger size.

Source: Smithsonian Guidelines for Accessible Design
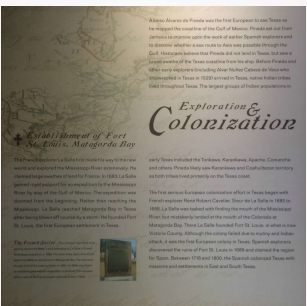
Fonts: More Readable

- In general: regular typefaces (not **BOLD** or *italic*)
- Don't set text in ALL CAPS
- Serif fonts:
  - Times New Roman
  - New Century Schoolbook
- Sans serif fonts:
  - Helvetica
  - Univers 55
  - Futura

Fonts: Less Readable

- *Script* Because all the letters connect and contain flourishes, script fonts make it harder for the eye to distinguish one letter from the next. This makes these fonts harder to read overall.

- Eroded fonts don't have smooth edges, which makes it difficult for the eye to recognize the letter forms. Use them sparingly in both print and web applications.

These fonts all evoke a particular feeling or mood. There are some cases where they might be your best option. If you choose to use these types of fonts, use them sparingly and at a very large size, and recognize that you are sacrificing readability for some viewers.

Fonts: Less Readable

Texas State Cemetery, Austin, TX

Fonts: Overused Fonts

Comic Sans

Papyrus

Looking for an alternative font? I often use www.dafont.com for free, downloadable fonts that are fully licensed for non-commercial use.

Texas State Cemetery, Austin, TX

Composition: Colors and Contrast

Texas State Cemetery, Austin, TX

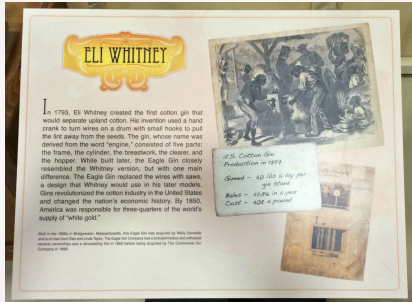## Composition: Colors and Contrast

National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland

Composition: Image Orientation

Time Exposures: Picturing Isleta Pueblo in the 19th Century, Museum of Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX

Composition: Capacity

Bayer Museum of Agriculture, Lubbock, TX

Composition: Capacity

"World War I Dentistry," British Dental Association

Take-Aways

- Choose the right type of visual for your message.

- Look for simple, well-composed, and dynamic images.

- Rely on fonts that are highly readable (and limit use of those that are not).

- Think about balance, contrast, image orientation, and capacity when putting it all together.

Contact Information

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