

# MEANS TO MEASURE TOOLS FOR EXHIBITION MAKERS



Stichting Musea en  
Herinneringscentra

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## Improving Museum Education

KWIE

The Museums and Memorial Centres 40-45 Foundation (SMH) has introduced the two-year-programme Improving Museum Education (KWIE) in January 2018. In this programme fourteen museums worked together to improve the quality of museum education in Second World War museums and SMH wishes to share their results with the entire field. The products from KWIE have been developed to improve the overall quality of museum education.

Stichting Musea en  
Herinneringscentra

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Ministerie van Volksgezondheid,  
Welzijn en Sport

## Colophon

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# MEANS TO MEASURE TOOLS FOR EXHIBITION MAKERS

Educational programmes differ per organisation. But what most historical museums have in common is that their programmes centre around the same thing: their exhibition. The museum exhibition is the core educational element of every museum. It attractively packages the most important information and stories the museum wants to tell and makes it accessible for a broad audience. It connects visitors with objects, photographs and footage of the past and transports them to a different world. Making a good quality exhibition, however, is not an easy job.

*Means to measure* is a tool to help you in this process. It can help you to make choices and to set goals during the creation of your exhibition and is useful afterwards as well to evaluate your own exhibition and those of others. It helps to gain insights in different elements of an exhibition and how it all fits together.

There are many things to keep in mind while making an exhibition and even more to accidentally forget. *Means to measure* aims to make these elements easier to understand, to make sure you don't forget anything and that you and your colleagues are talking about the same thing when discussing issues that arise when making an exhibition. It consists of a rubric which shows an overview of important themes and exhibition elements divided into categories. Each element can be scored with 0, 1, or 2 points. An explanation of each element and what criteria need to be met for a certain score can be found in an accompanying booklet. This also includes tips and tricks to get you to the next step and recommended websites, books, publications or organisations to help you make your best exhibition yet.

*Means to measure* is a translated extract of a Dutch publication produced during the two-year programme Improving Museum Education (KWIE, 2018-2020). In this programme fourteen Dutch Second World War museums worked together to improve the overall quality of museum education in organisations that deal with the Second World War. Improving Museum Education is an initiative of the Museums and Memorial Centres 40-45 Foundation (SMH).

Below you can find 5 examples of elements from the rubric to help you build and evaluate your exhibitions. For more information about the publication or the two year programme Improving Museum Education, please contact [secretariaat@smh40-45.nl](mailto:secretariaat@smh40-45.nl).

# STORYTELLING

## Explanation

In storytelling we depend on narrative structures to communicate information. Stories can help visitors to give meaning to locations, images and historical objects. They make it easier to learn and easier to remember. Storytelling is not necessarily non-fictional, but it can be a way to improve the way facts and information are communicated.

## Score card

**0 points: *The exhibition has not used storytelling.***

The information in the museum, in whatever form, are purely informative and only aimed at communicating factual information.

**1 point: *The exhibition has used storytelling in some places.***

Most of the information in the museum, in whatever form, is purely informative and only aimed at communicating factual information. In some points, storytelling is used to make information more accessible.

**2 points: *Storytelling is used in the entire exhibition.***

Storytelling is used in the entire exhibition. All information is connected to and communicated through different storylines.

## Tips and Tricks

Sometimes it is difficult to know in what ways storytelling can be incorporated in an exhibition. Try to start with subjects or information that can easily be placed in a narrative such as a person's biography or the history of a location. To do so you can use the format *7 steps for storytelling*, which can be found below. It is also important to know which message you wish to convey. This gives direction in making decisions about which stories should be included. To learn more about storytelling it is important to find inspiration beyond Second World War museums as well, or even beyond museums in general. Take a look at other narrative media such as films, novels, music, podcasts, or amusement parks. Pay attention to their choice of stories, how they strengthen each other and which methods are used.

## Tools

- Breda University of Applied Sciences, research "Storytelling and Customer Experience"
- Amusement park De Efteling
- Erfgoed Brabant, "Crossroads"
- Emotive Project, [www.emotiveproject.eu](http://www.emotiveproject.eu)
- Appendix: 7 steps of storytelling

# 7 STEPS OF STORYTELLING

Using storytelling in the museum can help to connect visitors to the exhibition's message, stories and lessons. Storytelling makes it easier for visitors to remember large amounts of information and to tell it to others. During the project 'Crossroads' of Erfgoed Brabant, a project on 75 years of freedom in the Dutch province North-Brabant, a tool has been developed which can be used when making an exhibition. It shows a basic structure of seven steps with which exhibition texts can be given more narrative qualities. The steps show how, using factual information as its base, you can build a story.

## Prologue

The prologue is a short overview of what has happened before the story starts. It can include a short historical background or a quick recap of a subtheme within Second World War history that is at the centre of the story. This is followed by a short history of the main character.

## Set-up

In the set-up you include when and where the story takes place. The main character is introduced: what kind of situation do they find themselves in and what does this mean for them?

## Inciting incident

The inciting incident is the action or event that gets the story moving. There is a problem the character needs to act on or a question that they need to answer.

## Turning point

At a turning point a story goes into a different direction. The character is often faced with a dilemma or an important choice. Sometimes the choices or actions of others cause a shift for the main character. As the story continues, the stakes get higher and actions and events follow each other at a greater speed.

## Climax

The climax is the high or the low point of the story. An exciting or dramatic moment. The problem gets solved or the question answered.

## Resolution

The story is wrapped up. It can give insights or a message to remember.

## Epilogue

In the epilogue is told what happened to the main character. Most important is what impact the events of the Second World War had on the main character's life.

This tool can be used in all kinds of stories. Pay attention to which parts of the story fit with which step and dare to only choose one climax. When it is difficult to choose the right climax for the story, try starting the story at the end and work your way back!

# HISTORICAL THINKING SKILLS

## Explanation

By giving context and an historical framework, the exhibition maker can ease a visitor into a subject. This allows the visitor to activate their historical thinking skills. Historical thinking skills are skills such as collecting, ordering, explaining and visualising. These elements make sure that someone is able to put an event in the context of the past and can reason about it as seen from the past rather than the present.

## Score card

**0 points: *The exhibition does not encourage historical thinking skills.***

In the exhibition historical events are not placed within a (correct) historical framework which prevents the visitor from putting it in the right context. The result is that this might inspire wrong conclusions and parallels with the present that are not supported by facts.

**1 point: *Parts of the exhibition encourage historical thinking skills.***

Some parts of the exhibition place historical events in their correct historical context. Using this context, visitors can collect and order information, explain events and visualise the events by using a variety of sources.

**2 points: *The exhibition encourages historical thinking skills.***

Throughout the exhibition the visitor is encouraged to use historical thinking skills. The visitor is offered a variety of sources from different sides of an event. The visitor can explain the event and name multiple causes and effects. This confronts the visitor with multiple perspectives. The visitor can place the exhibition's subject within a bigger historical frame.

## Tips en Tricks

Many exhibition makers want visitors to learn something new and convey a message. To achieve this, many exhibitions use means such as storytelling, different media and historical objects. All of these are used to improve historical thinking skills. Include in your project outline that these means should be used with the goal of improving historical thinking skills.

By including different sides to a story or event in an exhibition and by highlighting this, the visitor is given the option to be more critical and really analyse sources to investigate an event. As an extra layer to the exhibition, education materials can be developed which could, for instance, add more questions to sources and their origins to change or complicate their meaning or an event.

## Tools

- Allender, Tim et al. (2019) *Historical Thinking for History Teachers: A new approach to engaging students and developing historical consciousness.*
- Facing History and Ourselves

# TARGET AUDIENCES

## Explanation

The most important question an exhibition maker needs to ask themselves at the start of a new project is: for who do we make this exhibition? A clear answer to this question is essential to the rest of the design process. Making this decision helps to make choices in storytelling, historical objects, ways of transmitting information, and vocabulary, and leads to a better final product. Sometimes you can include different layers of information for different target audiences within the same exhibition, but it is important to realise that some audiences do not go together. An exhibition specifically aimed at youth is probably not as interesting for seniors.

## Score card

**0 points: It is not clear who the target audience of the exhibition is.**

The tone of voice changes and the themes, storylines and ways of communicating information are not chosen with a clear target audience in mind.

**1 point: It is clear who the target audience of the exhibition is, but this is not visible throughout the entire exhibition.**

The ways of communicating are designed with a target audience in mind, but this is not used through the exhibition and/or is not always successful.

**2 points: It is clear who the target audience of the exhibition is and this is visible throughout the entire exhibition.**

The exhibition matches its storytelling, information, and vocabulary with its target audience. The target audience feels comfortable and can recognise themselves in the content and how it is communicated.

## Tips en Tricks

Together with your project team, define which target audience(s) you wish to reach and make decisions based on their wants and needs. Make personas or profiles to better understand certain visitor groups. Another way to gain more insight in different audiences and how to please them in an exhibition is by working with response groups or partner organisations.

## Tools

- Lacovelli, Stephanie. "Using Personas in the Design Process of Digital Exhibit Interactives" accessible at [www.openexhibits.org](http://www.openexhibits.org)
- "Personas and designing the ideal museum experience" accessible at [www.transcendstrategic.com](http://www.transcendstrategic.com)
- Dr. Falk, John. "Understanding Museum Visitors' Motivations and Learning" accessible at [www.slks.dk](http://www.slks.dk).

# EXPERIENCE

## Explanation

Ever since the 1990s, many museums try to make sure exhibitions include 'experiences'. A visitor should not only have learned something or have understood a certain message, but they should also have been immersed in the subject matter. This can be done in many different ways. There might have been additional programming, a special show or viewing or elements in the exhibition that are immersive. The focus of this indicator is on adding experiences to an exhibition; when does an exhibition have enough 'experiences' to have that wow-factor for visitors.

## Score card

**0 points: *There is nothing to experience in the exhibition.***

The visitor went home, perhaps having seen and learned plenty, but without having experienced anything.

**1 point: *There are a few experiences included in the exhibition, but these are all rooted in the same principle.***

The visitor goes home with the feeling that they have had some experiences, but that these experiences all seemed similar. It was a one-trick-pony which could have prevented the visitor from completely being immersed.

**2 points: *There are several varied ways in which experiences are included in the exhibition.***

The visitor went home with the idea that they had many experiences. There were different experiences, some of these strengthened each other. The visitor is left with the idea that they really learned something and have been immersed in another world.

## Tips en Tricks

The word experience can be difficult for museums that deal with the history of the Second World War. Because what constitutes as an experience? It is important to discuss this in your team and to evaluate which stories and methods are appropriate for an experience. Listen to the opinions in your team, but especially those of your visitors.

There are many ways to add experience elements to your exhibition. By means of storytelling visitors can be immersed in personal stories and digital aids or games can be improved by didactic methods. Exhibits of unique objects and stories can cause wonder in visitors. Make interesting choices in display or framing that surprise your visitor. Experience is so varied a subject, that every museum has to make its own choices to create their own wow-factor. Experiment!

## Tools

- Vermeeren, Arnold P.O. et al. (2018) *Future Museum Experience Design: Crowds, Ecosystems and Novel Technologies*.
- Somers, Erik. (2014) *De oorlog in het museum. Herinnering en verbeelding*.
- Laarse, Rob van der. (2011) *De oorlog als beleving: over de musealisering en enscenering van Holocaust-erfgoed*.
- CREATE-IT, Kenniscentrum Faculteit Digitale Media & Creatieve Industrie Hogeschool van Amsterdam



# AUDIO TOURS

## Explanation

Many museums and organisations use audio tours. Visitors can, accompanied by a virtual guide and often in their own language, listen to interesting facts or in depth information without having to read museum texts or page through a catalogue. Regular audio tours give additional information at selected museum objects. Special audio tours, which are growing in popularity, are usually voiced by famous actors, the museum's director or have a special narrative. Audio tours can be released as an app, downloaded on a smartphone or use special systems, such as podcatchers, which can be used or rented in some museums.

## Score card

*0 points: The exhibition does not have an audio tour.*

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The visitor has no option to use an audio tour in the exhibition.

*1 point: The exhibition has a regular audio tour.*

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The audio tour is a regular tour. The tour gives visitors more in depth information in the exhibition. The tour does not differentiate between different languages or audiences and has no special narrative.

*2 points: : The exhibition has audio tours for different audiences and/or audio tours with a special narrative.*

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The organisation has multiple audio tours for different audiences and/or an audio tour with a special narrative.

## Tips en Tricks

It is important to evaluate if an audio tour adds to the experience of a museum visit. The audio tour has to be an enrichment of a visit, not a goal on its own. The audio tour needs to be more than a narration of the text on the sign next to an object. Decide during the concept phase of building an exhibition what kind of audio tour should be included. Keep the target audience in mind throughout this process and if possible work with the target audience in the development of the audio tour.

## Tools

- Platform Guide ID
- Rosa Sala. "How to write the script of an audioguide" Nubart's Blog
- Lou Giansante. "Writing verbal descriptions for audio guides"
- Art Beyond Sight: Museum Education Institute



AIRBORNE  
MUSEUM  
HARTENSTEIN

Bevrijdingsmuseum Zeeland



nationaal  
onderduikmuseum  
aalten

museum | 1940  
ROTTERDAM | 1945  
NU

DOORLOGSMUSEUM  
OVERLOON



Nationaal Monument  
Kamp Amersfoort

VERZETS  
RESISTANCE  
MUSEUM

HERINNERINGSCENTRUM  
KAMP WESTERBORK



joods  
cultureel  
kwartier

NATIONAAL  
MONUMENT  
KAMP  
VUGHT

FRIES  
VERZETS  
MUSEUM

MUSEON

VRIJHEIDSMUSEUM

Indisch Herinneringscentrum  
DEN HAAG