

The purse during conservation.
Stringing on the new seeds and beads.

Conservation Gets Seedy

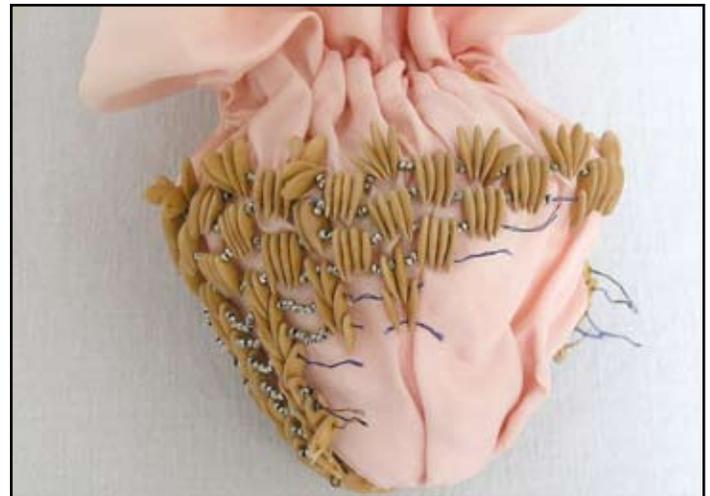
Amanda Harding
Conservator, Textiles & Organics
Parks Canada

Every once in a while a unique artefact in a collection is rediscovered. Working as a conservator of textiles and organics at Parks Canada in Winnipeg, I had the pleasure of being asked to conserve one such treasure. The artefact was a little pink silk drawstring purse with a beaded decoration made of hex cut steel beads and seeds! Unfortunately the seeds had attracted mice that had enjoyed feasting on one side of the purse.

To begin the conservation treatment an ecologist on staff at Parks Canada identified the seeds as cantaloupe seeds. Fresh cantaloupe seeds were procured then cleaned and dried. I pierced holes at both ends of each seed using a pin. The new beading was completed by joining new threads to the old and using the new seeds and the original loose steel beads to follow the original beading pattern. The new seeds can be identified because they are lighter than the old ones that have darkened over time.

The purse is back on exhibit at Motherwell Homestead, National Historic Site in Abernethy, Saskatchewan. Although the purse is not original to the site it does represent an item that a lady of the house would have made in the early twentieth-century.

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Before conservation



After conservation



Involving visitors in exhibits

If you haven't been there yet, try to visit the new [Bruce D. Campbell Farm and Food Discovery Centre at the University of Manitoba's Glenlea Research Station](#), a few minutes south of Winnipeg on Highway 75.

The exhibits are about Manitoba's agriculture and many of them use imaginative techniques to engage their visitors.

These are more than just "touchable" exhibits. "Flip lid" or "flapper" labels encourage visitors to uncover more information. Other interactive exhibits require the visitor to do something and the exhibit responds in some way to what the visitor does, giving feedback and encouraging more discovery.



This exhibit lets visitors select and grind different types of grains.



"Flip lid" or "flapper" labels



Simulated "corner store" checkout



This one allows you to use an ultrasound device to find out if the "sow" is pregnant.

Use more CRAP in your exhibit planning

This is the second in a four-part series on using CRAP.

CRAP is an acronym coined by Robin Williams, author of a number of publications on design.

It stands for:

- CONTRAST**
- REPETITION**
- ALIGNMENT**
- PROXIMITY**

These will all be touched on eventually, but **repetition** is the second on the list.

According to Williams:

The repetitive element may be a bold font, a thick rule (line), a certain bullet, color, design element, particular format, the spatial relationships, etc. It can be anything that a reader will visually recognize.



Above is a good example of repetition from the Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre. The shape and colours of the title panels above are repeated in the display cases below. [as an added note, the background colour for this text box is a lighter tint of the label colour in the photo]



A panel from the Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre in Morden. The panel colours, text colour and placement, and positions of objects are all examples of repetition.

Exhibits have a lot in common with websites

Get to the point. Use short words and phrases, rather than longer ones, and omit unnecessary words.

Keep it simple. Express one thought at a time, and use plain language.

Those could be quotes from a museum textbook on label writing, but in fact they're from one of many online guides on how to write for the internet.

The challenges are very similar: museum visitors have to read standing up; website visitors have to read on screen. Neither is comfortable nor encourages reading.

Museum visitors and web visitors both tend to scan passages of text, rather than

reading them from beginning to end. In response, the best museum labels and website texts are organized in hierarchies.

For museums, that means an exhibit title, often a sub-title, introductory label, secondary labels, group labels, caption labels and object or tombstone labels, all in descending size.

It's interesting to compare label writing guidelines from Bev Serrell's book, [Exhibit Labels](#), with those from a website called [provenance unknown](#), from which the two quotations at the start of this article were taken.

Do a web search for "writing for the web" or check with your local library.

Quote of the Day

Exhibit planners must embrace a true concern for museum visitors if we hope to create more effective, engaging exhibits.

Kathleen McLean, 1993
Author of *Planning for People in Museum Exhibitions*

About NOTES

NOTES is available free to community museums. There are roughly four issues a year, depending on how the editor feels. If you have comments or suggestions, please send an email address to:

david.mcinnis@mts.net

Copies are sent electronically as pdfs.