

How to Win a Gold Medal in Postal History



FIP Commission for Postal History

# How to Win a Gold Medal in Postal History

March 2009

**Streamline Seminar 3**

# Topics

1. Introduction
2. Choose the right subject
3. Send “Advance” pages
4. Understand the scoring system
5. Know what the judges are looking for
6. Not Gold, what next?
7. From Gold to Large Gold



# 1. Introduction



# Assumptions

- ❖ Basic knowledge of postal history exhibits contained in the GREVs and SREVs and Guidelines is assumed
  - Please check them on our website:
  - **[www.fippostalhistory.com](http://www.fippostalhistory.com)**
  - *SS1-The New SREVs and Guidelines of the Postal History Class*
  
- ❖ Focus of this presentation is the exhibitor – although judges may benefit, *SS2 The Judging Criteria for Postal History Exhibits*, is specifically for judges.



## **2. Choose the right subject**



# Considerations

- ❖ Must understand evaluation of Importance
- ❖ Understand benefits of Broad versus Narrow scope subjects



From 1.1.2009\* postal history exhibits will be judged under three time periods

1. Up to 1875 (pre - General Postal Union)
2. From 1875-1945
3. After 1945

Each exhibit fits into the period where it starts or where its main contents lies

\*adopted by the 70th FIP Congress Bucharest June 2008)



# New Time Periods

- ❖ Subjects in the later two groups will have more opportunity to earn Importance points
- ❖ When choosing scope – be aware of boundaries
  - End exhibit subject earlier
  - Use “forerunners” to start exhibit subject





## 3. Send "advance" pages



# Advance Pages

- ❖ Title Page
- ❖ Summary page
  - List of important items (up to 12)
  - Main changes since last exhibited
  - Time required to assemble collection
  - Results of personal research
  - References (if not on title page) especially own publications



## 4. Understand the scoring system



# Postal History Scoring System

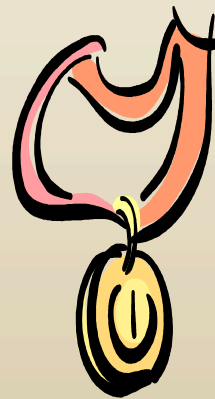
- ❖ Point allocations – each will be discussed in detail

Evaluation area		Points
Presentation		5
Condition and Rarity (Material)		30
	Condition	10
	Rarity	20
Knowledge and Personal Study		35
Treatment and Importance		30
	Importance	10
	Treatment	20
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>100</b>



# To get a Gold medal.....

- ❖ You must get 90 points or more but....
- ❖ At this level, judges will be looking not only what you have, but also for what's missing from the exhibit or errors you have made and deduct points accordingly
- ❖ Therefore, one can only lose 10 points no more!
  - About 3 points for Treatment and Importance
  - About 3 points from Knowledge and Research
  - About 3 points for Condition and Rarity
  - Maximum 1 point from Presentation



# 5. Know what the judges looking for

## Exhibit evaluation



# Presentation = 5 points

## Why is this important?

A good presentation facilitates the understanding and attraction of the exhibit to judges and viewers

If the exhibit is unattractive or difficult to read, judges will not be inclined to spend enough time on their evaluation and you will lose points under the other criteria.



# General layout

- ❖ Should be neat and attractive
- ❖ Not too overcrowded or too much blank spaces on page –
  - pages with inner frame lines should be avoided
  - Exception – rare items can be “set off” by extra white space
- ❖ Arrangement of items on page should show some variation
- ❖ Font Sizes – not overpower material
  - Main write-up readable (not too small)
  - Page headings stand out from detailed write-up
- ❖ Font Style – avoid writing all in caps or letters which are difficult to read





# Balance

- ❖ Pages should be consistently full with material across all frames although arrangement should vary
  - Exception – very rare items might be mounted alone
- ❖ For Subclass 2C – non philatelic items should be relevant to the subject and not overwhelm the philatelic material
- ❖ Oversized items can be shown in double-pages; alternatively they may be cut through the page – i.e. slits in the page with part of the cover not visible
- ❖ Double pages can contain one large item as well as several smaller ones
  - Too many double-pages with single items is not recommended since they reduce the total number of items shown in an exhibit



# Material placement

Use the one square meter frame to promote your exhibit:

FIP 3	FIP 3	FIP 3	FIP 3
FIP 2	FIP 1	FIP 1	FIP 2
FIP 2	FIP 1	FIP 1	FIP 2
FIP 4	FIP 4	FIP 4	FIP 4

- ❖ Where a page is placed within a frame may determine its ability to catch the eye
- ❖ Pages 6 and 7 are generally the most strategic
- ❖ Bottom row pages are the least eye catching.
- ❖ The height of your judges WILL matter



# Illustrations

- ❖ Postmarks only need to be illustrated when originals are not clear
- ❖ Maps should be of reasonable size and not contain excessive details.
- ❖ Colour scans, photographs, photocopies of covers should be at least 25% different in size to the original. (May be more than 25% smaller if still readable)
  - Full size (or enlarged) scan of a postal marking or part of a cover allowed
  - Black and white reproductions should be upgraded to colour



## Condition = 10 points

### Why is this important?

- ❖ Covers in good condition are a pleasure to look at
- ❖ Covers in the best condition represent good investment over similar ones in poor condition
- ❖ Exceptionally good condition can earn points lost for rarity



# Condition Factors

- ❖ Postal markings, hand-written markings and datestamps should be readable. This is even more important in postmark (marcophily) exhibits
- ❖ Stamps on cover or with postmarks should be in good condition
- ❖ Stampless letters before the issue of stamps should be clean and with minimal creasing and minimal torn edges
- ❖ Non-philatelic material should be in good condition and preferably original e.g. photos, newspaper etc



# Exceptions

- ❖ Disaster mail e.g. shipwreck, airplane crash, train crash, disinfected mail, military letters during campaigns etc. cannot be expected to be in perfect condition
- ❖ A “rare” item in less than satisfactory condition can be shown if **required** by the story. Avoid showing it as its bad condition might cost more points than its “rarity” will earn.



# Improvements

- ❖ Minor improvement to the condition of the cover is acceptable e.g. removal of dirt, stains, refolding stampless letters
- ❖ Major improvement such as rebacking of a front, repairing major tears, redrawing of the address etc should be mentioned on the page
- ❖ Improvement of postmarks and hand-written markings are not acceptable and will be treated as forgeries
- ❖ Doubtful items are likely to be referred to the expert team for further investigation



## Philatelic Rarity = 20 points

### Why is this important?

- ❖ Presence of rare items reflects the quality of the exhibit, more rare items there are, harder for the exhibit to be duplicated
- ❖ Use of rare items instead of more common examples also shows the knowledge of the exhibitor
- ❖ A “Gold medal” exhibit is expected to have rare items as appropriate to its subject





# Definitions

- ❖ “Rarity” = the number known and has no connection to item cost
- ❖ “Scarcity” = quantity available relative to DEMAND and relates directly to cost.
  - This is also known as “relative rarity” which distinguishes between important rarities and minor rare varieties.
- ❖ Rare items are not necessarily **EXPENSIVE**
- ❖ Exhibit text should convey rarity information (how many known and *what exactly* is rare)



## How many rare items?

- ❖ A “Broad Scope” exhibit will be expected to have many rarities in every frame. However not all rarities known for the subject will be needed.
- ❖ A “Narrow Scope” exhibit with a few known rarities will be expected to have all of them.



# Which Rarity?

- ❖ Only rarity relevant to the subject should be shown
- ❖ Inappropriate or duplicate rarities would not gain points or may even lose points under treatment!
- ❖ Important to show rarities well known to judges, EVEN if these are not the most rare for the subject.
- ❖ In summary: A Gold Medal exhibit is one that cannot be duplicated easily.



# Indicating Rarity

- ❖ Methods – no one way
  - Text – different font or bolded, set off from other write-up
  - Backing or borders
  - Extra white space around item
  - Dots, stars or other pointers are less desirable
- ❖ Any method should be unobtrusive but also unmistakable
- ❖ Any marked item should have text that makes its rarity easily understood
- ❖ Only the very best items should be marked – too many lessens impact



# Knowledge, Personal Study & Research = 35 points

## Why is this important?

- ❖ Postal history is about story telling, therefore you need to do some detailed research before telling a good story
- ❖ Most number of points (35) in a single category
- ❖ Personal Study distinguishes between a true philatelist and someone merely copying descriptions from auction catalogs and books



# Types of Knowledge

An exhibit is a story illustrated with philatelic (and non-philatelic) items. The written storyline reflects your knowledge and so does the material you choose to illustrate your points

- ❖ Explicit Knowledge
  - Explanations and analysis in write-ups
- ❖ Implicit Knowledge
  - Material selected to tell story
  - Comprehensive bibliography
- ❖ Research & Personal Study
  - New Information presented as part of exhibit story



# Guidelines: all Sub-classes

Are the materials shown analysed correctly?

- ❖ Avoid repeating information obvious on items shown (“parroting”)
- ❖ Information relating to primary focus of story should stand out and is required
- ❖ Information about secondary aspects should be included when appropriate; it helps to explain your items and you have space
- ❖ Knowledge of all the postal history aspects and the historical background will be rewarded if included.
- ❖ The key facts and relevant information must be easy to locate on the pages
- ❖ Use quarter/half page section introductions to avoid having to repeat the same information on all the pages



# Guidelines: all Sub-classes

- ❖ Your organization should reflect your chosen primary focus and allow your knowledge to be displayed
- ❖ New research will be rewarded – make sure the judges know it's yours!
  - Be careful not to include too much detailed write up (no research articles, please!)





## Sub-class 2A – postal history

- ❖ Avoid organizations that relate too closely to traditional stamp exhibits
- ❖ Make sure your write-ups emphasize postal history and not stamp-printing related details
- ❖ Inclusion of non-philatelic items should be relevant and very carefully selected
- ❖ Historical or social commentary should be limited and not distract from telling the philatelic story. Use a distinct font if such commentary is included.



## Sub-class 2B - marcophily

- ❖ Organization and the primary focus of explanations is markings
- ❖ Earliest and latest known dates of markings are essential information
- ❖ Cancels not known on cover should be noted as “not recorded on cover” or “no covers known”
- ❖ Detailed discussions of rates and routes not necessary but some knowledge shown is desirable. Consider using a different font to differentiate from primary text.



## **Sub-class 2C –Historical, Social, and Special Studies**

- ❖ Selection of relevant non-philatelic material is considered under Knowledge
- ❖ Knowledge of historical or social aspects of exhibit story **MUST** be displayed by organization, balance of exhibit, and in write-ups
- ❖ Information on non-philatelic items should be included.
- ❖ Consider using two distinct fonts (or colours if not too distracting) to distinguish the two types of information



# Philatelic Importance = 10 points

## Why is this important?

In reality only subjects of major importance (scoring 9 – 10 points) can achieve gold to large gold medal level



# Definition and examples

- ❖ Importance in an exhibit means “subject significance” within the contexts of
  - The chosen collecting area (challenge)
  - World postal system development
- ❖ Typically longer time periods and larger geographic or system areas have higher importance
- ❖ Broad Scope exhibits typically have higher importance than Narrow Scope exhibits
- ❖ Sub-class 2C: Philatelic Importance of an exhibit (5 points) Historical and social importance of the subject (5 points)
  - The relevance, balance and importance of **non-philatelic material** will be evaluated by the judges



# Examples

- ❖ Postal history of a capital city is generally more important than a small town
- ❖ Studies of larger “systems”: railroad or steamer packet mail, military campaign mail, etc are more important than studies of similar smaller systems like tramway or fluvial ship mail, etc.
- ❖ Study of domestic postal rates is less important than international postal rates between countries in certain time periods as the latter is generally a more complex subject
- ❖ Broad scope versus narrow scope: 19th Century postal history of Imperial China vs. postal history of China in the “Gold Yuan” period
- ❖ Subclass 2C: A study of events which have major impact to society is more important as are studies of monumental events versus minor historical or regional events



# Examples

- ❖ Greater complexity of the subject can overcome “size” – for example study of mail thru ports that were major transit ports: St. Thomas, Brindisi, Aachen, Singapore or Hong Kong (in the earlier time periods) are important.
- ❖ Studies of postal innovations or major postal impact are important – first use of adhesive stamps, machines for cancelling or sorting mail, etc.
- ❖ The new time period divisions should benefit postal history exhibits of countries founded in the later two periods (Peoples Republic of China, Vietnam or Israel, etc.)



# Advice

There is little an exhibitor can do to change the inherent importance of any chosen subject.

- ❖ The Scope of the subject can be adjusted to gain importance points – always keeping in mind that a badly treated wide scope subject that gains 1 -2 points on importance might lose those points and possibly more on treatment.
- ❖ It is sometimes possible to explain a subject's complexity or impact (usually on the title page) in such a way that the judges see greater importance.





# Treatment = 20 points

## Why is this important?

- ❖ Postal history is about story telling, a good story will be rewarded by higher marks in treatment
- ❖ Even if the chosen subject is important, poor treatment will lose more marks than gained from importance
- ❖ Even if the exhibit has many great rarities, poor treatment will lose more marks than gained from these items



# Title Page

- ❖ Title page is evaluated as part of treatment – KEY page because it is sent in advance.
- ❖ Title page must:
  - Establish the scope
  - State the purpose
  - Provide the organization
- ❖ Title page may:
  - Give some background
  - Provide a bibliography
  - Include a philatelic item



## Title Page II

### ❖ Establishing Scope

Set boundaries that are clear and logical:-

- Date ranges e.g. 18th Century, 1941-45, Pre-UPU etc. Dates included in the title must be related to the Postal History aspect - not just earliest and latest covers in the exhibit!
- Geographic region e.g. Mail between X and Y country
- Historical/social e.g. Mining industry and the post

### ❖ Stating Purpose

- Identify which aspect of postal history will dominate. Is this an exhibit mainly about routes, rates, markings, history or something else?
- Describe the development contained in the exhibit



## Title Page III

- ❖ Explain the Organization
  - An Outline is recommended
  - Use the sections identified in the Title Page outline as the Section Headers within the body of the exhibit
  
- ❖ Provide brief background – needed for lesser known subjects.
  - Opportunity to explain significance of chosen subject.
  
- ❖ If more information is needed than will fit on one page – use up to half pages introducing a section instead.



## Body of exhibit

- ❖ General development of the subject – Is it a smooth flowing story?
- ❖ Focus of development should not change back and forth
- ❖ Make sure the scope is not too wide for the number of frames allocated



## Body of exhibit

Sections should be sized according to the subject matter NOT the number of items you have (or don't have) to show

- ❖ Materials shown (including non-philatelic) need to be relevant to the subject.
- ❖ No unexplained gaps in the material presented
- ❖ Large-scale duplication of similar items should be avoided
- ❖ Using only rare items can lead to imbalance
- ❖ Lack of key rare items can leave gaps

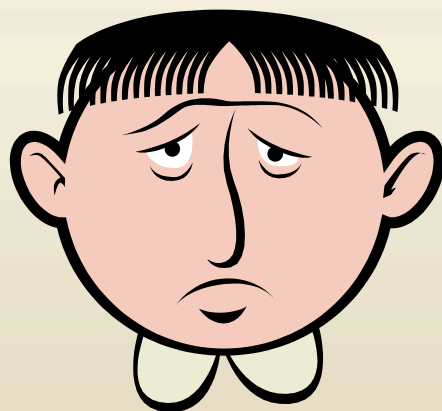


# Techniques

- ❖ Page HEADINGS are a must
  - Running headings that identify the section
  - Unique page headings that “describe” what is on that page - if they are not unique, you either have duplicate material or the wrong heading
  - Reading only the page headings will help you determine if your story “flows” logically
  
- ❖ The first page of each section should be clearly identified
  - Larger font for heading, shaded box or other technique
  - If you need to write a quarter to half a page of information to introduce a section, that alone is distinctive.



## 6. Not Gold, what next?





## Get your point scores

- ❖ Your Commissioner will get your points breakdown – the subtotals for Condition & Rarity and Treatment & Importance are not always given
- ❖ If at show, meet with judges at the frames. Your Commissioner can find out the time if it isn't in the program



## Analyze your point scores

- ❖ Presentation : if you did not score 4 or 5, you really need to look at your pages “in the frames” –
  - it is difficult to assess page balance or determine overcrowding on a page by page basis.
- ❖ Condition and Rarity: if you scored 28-30, you do NOT need to spend money for more rare items!
- ❖ If you scored less, look at condition first – it only takes a few “ugly” items to influence judges in this area. Determine how to upgrade.



# Analyze your point scores

- ❖ Knowledge : if you did not score 32 or more, you need to work in this area.
  - If you have done a lot of research and personal study on your subject, try to understand why this is not being appreciated by the judges
  
- ❖ Treatment & Importance: if you did not score 27 or more
  - try to get feedback on your importance component – it will be the most difficult to influence
  - The treatment component is the most under your control – starting with the title page





## 7. From Gold to Large Gold...



## To get a Large Gold medal

- ❖ One must get at least 95 points
- ❖ At this level, judges will be looking for what's missing from the exhibit or errors you have made and deduct points accordingly
- ❖ Therefore, one can only lose 5 points no more!
  - About 2 points for Treatment and Importance
  - 1 point from Knowledge and Research
  - 1 point for Condition and Rarity
  - 1 point from Presentation



# What you need....

- ❖ Choose an appropriate subject to exhibit
- ❖ Be a recognized authority in the subject shown
- ❖ Know what you need in your exhibit
- ❖ Rarities: A Large Gold exhibit should have a reasonable number of World Class rarities



# Choose an appropriate subject

- ❖ The subjects of Large Gold exhibits are nearly always important
- ❖ “Importance” must score at least 9 or 10 points out of 10
  - The new “Three time period” benefits relatively modern exhibits
- ❖ Innovation - Try a different approach to a well known subject



# Be a recognized expert...

.....so that the judges know who you are

- ❖ Contribute research articles to the philatelic press
- ❖ Write books on the subject
- ❖ Give seminars
- ❖ Be a member of specialized study groups or form a study group if one does not exist
- ❖ Make no mistakes in your exhibit write-up  
- “Knowledge, personal study and research” must score at least 34 points out of 35  
**which is a lot and cannot be achieved without a considerable effort**





# Know what you need.....

- ❖ Fill all the gaps in your exhibit
- ❖ Know what the judges expect to see
- ❖ “Treatment” must score 19 points out of 20 if the “importance” of the subject is only 9 points. This is the hardest goal to accomplish.



# Rarities

- ❖ Set a plan to acquire rarities not yet in your exhibit as long as they are relevant to the story
- ❖ “Advertise” your rarities in form of bold statements or statistics (one of two recorded etc) – but be prepared to get challenged by others
- ❖ “Rarities” must score 18 to 19 points out of 20 and the “condition” should be 10 out of 10 points
- ❖ MONEY - Do you have sufficient funds for buying important items in fine quality?



**Like winning a battle.....**

**.....There are other factors**



# Timing

## Why is this important?

- ❖ Can your exhibit be duplicated?
- ❖ Are there similar exhibits around?
  - No – Great!
  - Yes
    - Better than yours? – Not so good news!
    - Not as good as yours? – Better news!



# The Place

## Why is this important?

- ❖ Consider the place to show your exhibit (less critical in World Stamp Exhibitions)
  - Asian exhibits might fare better in Asia
  - European exhibits might be better judged in Europe
  - Americas exhibits should get a better understanding in shows held in America
- ❖ Particularly for the Grand Prix award contestants - there are less exhibits in the National Class to compete with



# The Human Factor

## Why is this important?

- ❖ Judges are only human, show them what they like to see
- ❖ **Lucky** 😊 - If the judges know your subject well and appreciate what you show them
- ❖ **Unlucky** ☹️ - If the judges know your subject *too well* and know what you are missing!



# Thanks, any....

