

# Considerations for effective animal I.D. exhibit signs

by Scott Schiller, ZooGraphix.com

Here are some things I think about when evaluating existing signs, or before creating new ones. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it does begin the process of thinking critically about exhibit sign design.

## Easy to Read

- Optimal typefaces (size, weight, color, etc.)
- Character of typeface: serious or playful, loud or quiet

## Eye-Catching, Attention-Grabbing

- Bold, bright, striking colors
- Interesting composition or arrangement of elements
- Entices you to stop and read it

## Organized Information

- Logical/understandable hierarchy of information
- Pleasing layout
- Good balance of words, data, imagery (not cluttered)
- Info not too small to read

## Art Style

- Photo: is it high quality, in focus, does it clearly show the animal's prominent features?
- Illustration/sketch: is it naturalistic or cartoon-y?
- Does it convey enough information at a quick glance to help the reader better understand the animal, find it in the exhibit, and match it to the graphic?

## Accurate Information/Representation

- Does the photo or illustration of the animal reflect its correct proportions, colors, patterns, behaviors?
- Is the grammar, spelling and data without error?
- Is the information current, interesting and factual?

## Quantity of Information

- Is it too much? Too little?
- Is it relevant to the age/demographic of the reader?
- Does it adequately summarize/encapsulate the most important aspects of the animal (appearance, size, diet, habitat, etc)?

## Quick Read

- Is it enough to convey most information, but not so much to be overwhelming or time-consuming?
- How much time on average does the visitor spend in front of each sign? Is it adequate?

## Language of Copy

- Is the language appropriate for the target age?
- Is the writing clear, direct and engaging? Or is it silly, anthropomorphic or cute-sy?

## Size of Sign

- Too small, easy to miss
- Larger than the information requires

## Shape of Sign

- Is it something other than usual square or rectangle?
- Does the shape invite the viewer?

## Placement of Sign

- Is it too low? Too high?
- Is there enough lighting to read it?
- Is it hidden or obscured by foliage, traffic, other?

## Type of Material

- Too shiny/reflective?
- Too dull, no contrast?
- Does it warp, fade, chip or crack easily in the elements?

## Location of Sign

- Inside lighting considerations—is it under a spotlight, in shadow?
- Outside light and elements—exposed to sunshine, covered in snow?
- Is it directly in high traffic area or set off the main path? Can visitors get close enough to read it?
- Does the location make sense for the information imparted?

## Durability of Sign Material

- Plastic, wood, paper, vinyl, fabric — all have advantages and limitations
- Is it easy and cost-effective to repair or replace when needed?

## Type and Quality of Sign Installation

- Is it prone to detaching, falling off, etc.?
- Is it easy to move or remove when necessary?

## Number of Signs

- Too few could cause confusion (absent signage)
- Too many could cause visitors to dismiss the information or ignore it altogether