

Judging Aerophilately
A Standard Seminar Paper
Stephen Reinhard

This is a revision by Stephen Reinhard of the paper originally prepared by Egil H. Thomassen.

Both the exhibiting and judging of Aerophilately are based upon the Regulations and Guidelines for Aerophilatelic Exhibits at FIP Exhibitions.

Article 2 of the regulations tells us that an Aerophilatelic exhibit is composed essentially of postal documents transmitted by air, bearing evidence of having been flown. We need to interpret this liberally in order to include items of great importance to aerophilatelists:

- The word “postal” is to be interpreted to cover all transportation of mail by air. If this isn’t done we would be unable to include in exhibits such things as the Vin Fiz flown cards, the Great Barrier Island Pigeon Post, entrusted mail from the Siege of Paris or various private Pioneer material.
- “Transmitted by air” must include mail that was prepared to be flown but couldn’t be due to such things as poor weather or mechanical problems.

Article 3 states that “An exhibit shall consist solely of appropriate philatelic material.” Here the key word is “philatelic.” That means that non-philatelic materials such as photos, maps, time-tables, etc., should be used only when absolutely necessary to help the story along, and there is no philatelic material extant that will do the same thing.

Article 4 introduces the “Criteria for Evaluating Exhibits,” and this is what I want to talk about today. This criteria is

- Treatment (20) and Importance (10)
- Philatelic and related knowledge, Personal Study and Research (35)
- Condition (10) and Rarity (20)
- Presentation (5)

Let’s start with Treatment. This requires an evaluation of the completeness and correctness of the material selected by the exhibitor to illustrate a chosen subject. Sub article 3.4 states: “As for any story, an exhibit should have a clear beginning, a central theme and a logical ending. Thus, the display must begin with an introductory page in which the exhibitor defines in full what the subject is, explains how it will be developed, and specifies what the self-imposed limits are.” What has the exhibitor done with his material?

Let’s consider the title of the exhibit. It must telescope what is going to be seen. The title alone must tell us the scope of the exhibit. Some examples of titles that don’t accomplish that:

- “China’s Airmail” 5 frames.
- “Turkey by Air” 5 frames.
- “Graf Zeppelin LZ 127 with Emphasis on Icelandic Mail” 8 frames
- “Italian Aerophilately” 5 frames.
- “Genuine Zeppelin Mail” to/from South America in the Period 1930-1934 5 frames
- “Variations on German Aerophilately 1888-1938” 8 frames

These are titles that need to be improved so that the title, alone, tells the scope of the exhibit. Some better titles: (Limit the Scope.)

- Argentina Air Mail and its Pioneers 1912-1950
- China Airmails 1920-1949
- Columbia-First Commercial Airlines (1920-1921)
- Finland Air Mail 1920-1946
- Zeppelin Contract Mail 1932
- Zeppelin Mail to and from Greece

Now let's look at the title page itself:

The most important part is the explanation of the concept of the exhibit. What is the exhibitor attempting to do? What is the scope? What are his constraints? How will he do it?

Many exhibits have title pages that are history lessons. The title page should be philatelic, not historical. If an illustration is placed on the title page it should be philatelic, not a photo of the plane or the pilot or the airport. It should be an integral part of the philatelic story being told.

A brief outline is fine but it shouldn't take up the entire page.

The exhibitor may cite a few of the better pieces and explain the significance to the exhibit.

While in many countries it is customary to put a bibliography at the bottom of the title page it is not required. I'd rather see that on a synopsis page that is sent to the judges in advance.

Now to the exhibit itself:

The exhibit must be developed and balanced on periods and areas selected in the title and the plan. An overweight of covers from one period, and the missing of significant items from another, is an exhibit that is out of balance.

The exhibitor should avoid showing covers documenting events of little or no consequence for the progress of airmail.

The introductory plan will usually outline what the exhibitor wants to show and prove. To evaluate completeness the judge will look to see if rare or interesting items are there, and whether the plan is carried through with proper philatelic material.

The exhibit must tell a story. The story must flow nicely from beginning to ending. For example, an 8-frame exhibit of the development of airmail in a country or region should not have a frame of crash mail at the end. Did the crashes all happen at the end of the story? No. These items should be filtered into the story throughout the exhibit.

There should be a mix of First Flight and other material which is sometimes called "commercial mail" in a development of airmail exhibit. The entire story can't be shown without some of both.

Relative to rates, certainly they are needed in a route development type of exhibit. But are they needed in an exhibit of Lindbergh flown mail or of pioneers or of mail flown at air fairs, etc. I think not. But, in a majority of exhibits they are needed. The rates can be placed beneath individual covers or, if the rates were constant during a particular period they can be arranged in a box at the beginning of the period and thus stated just once.

Duplication of rare material is to be avoided. However, exhibitors may use rare covers to show important variations, or mail sent to different destinations, etc. Recently I judged an exhibit where the exhibitor had 3 of the known four covers from a particular flight. When he was told that he should show only one his response was that he was looking for the fourth and intended to show all four when he got them. He asked me how I could sneer at these extremely rare items that cost him thousands of dollars each.

To tell the story it is most often wise to divide the exhibit into chapters and verses. This can be done, for example by using the chapter heading on the upper left of the page and the verse sub-heading on the upper right. So, let's say that he is showing airmail flown by Pan Am through 1940. His chapters could be The Caribbean, South and Central America; Trans-Pacific Airmail; Trans-Atlantic Airmail. Within the Trans-Pacific Chapter he could have sub-headings of Survey Flights, 1935 San Francisco to Manila, 1937 Extension to Macao and Hong Kong, 1940 U.S. to Auckland. We should be able to walk up to an exhibit at any point in the exhibit and tell exactly where we are. If we can't then there are treatment problems.

Stamps may also be included in an Aerophilatelic exhibit. However, the theme of the exhibit must still be the development of airmail service as shown by how the covers are organized. If the covers just show usages of the stamps then the exhibit will be transferred to Traditional.

Vignettes and airmail labels may be shown but they must also be shown on flown covers. The labels should not dominate the exhibit.

Lastly, an exhibit may not contain picture postcards where the picture side is what is deemed important, photos of aviation pioneers, stickers, etc. Remember the key words: Philatelic and Flown.

Importance:

Subject Importance: Sometimes I think that it would be better if this term wasn't part of the evaluation process. But it is and it is important that we all understand how it is to be used. Let me first say that no one country is more important than another. But the aerophilately of one country may be more important than the aerophilately of another only because of its contribution to the development of worldwide airmail. Certain airmail of Senegal, e.g., can be considered important because of the role that Senegal played in the development of South Atlantic Airmail. The airmail of Hong Kong can also be considered important because of the role that Hong Kong played in the development of airmail throughout Asia. There is no scale here that pits one country against another. What simply needs to be considered is how important is the story being told in the development of worldwide airmail?

Philatelic Importance: The second part of the "importance" criteria, and you won't find this spelled out in the regulations, is the ranking of the exhibit within its class. For example, how easy would it be to duplicate the exhibit? Is this the best exhibit of this material ever shown? Philatelically, is the material important?

Some other concepts to consider realizing that there are exceptions would be:

- A wide geographical area is generally more important than a smaller one.
- A pioneer period is generally more important than a modern one.
- A long period is generally more important than a short one.

But, judges must have an open mind. An exhibit that showed how the introduction of jet aircraft significantly changed the movement of mail by air, although modern, might be considered quite important. An exhibit of the Pioneer Period in some small country might not be considered very

important if it didn't lead to the development of scheduled air service within the country and eventually connecting to other countries.

Philatelic and Related Knowledge, Personal Study and Research:

The key item here is that each item shown should be explained and analyzed in the light of the title and introductory plan, but information given should not overwhelm the aerophilatelic material shown.

Most exhibitors are full of knowledge about their field of collecting, but many do not transfer this knowledge to the pages of their exhibit. We do not judge the writings of an exhibitor in philatelic journals for instance, but only what is on the exhibit pages.

Exhibits of first flights tend to follow catalogued information. "Knowledge" is not copying of catalogues or the writing of obvious things, but presenting not easily found information about rates, routes and other unusual facts.

The General Regulations say that "Personal Study is the proper analysis of the items." What is a "proper analysis" of a cover?

Overpaid covers, usual in many airmail exhibits, should be avoided as far as possible. However, if no properly franked covers can be found the analysis of the overpaid cover must state that it is overpaid and give the proper rate.

New research findings can be pointed out on the title page or by using terms such as "discovery copy." New research findings can also be pointed out on a synopsis page by indicating what should be looked for in the exhibit but remember that only what is in the frames is judged.

Condition and Rarity:

Condition and Rarity are obvious criteria, but often contradictory. In many cases the exhibitor will have to make a choice: Should he show a rare item in bad condition? In Aerophilately a lot of scarce Pioneer material is in bad condition. For quality one must bear in mind the quality obtainable. Modern material is generally easy to obtain and quality, therefore, should be first class.

For an airmail exhibit the postmarks and other markings are most important. They should be clear and crisp. They are the key evidence of the routing and transit time.

Repaired items are to be mentioned in the description. If the jury detects obviously fake or repaired items without this being pointed out by the exhibitor, a penalty will be imposed which may include a warning, a demand for expertization before being shown again, or, in severe cases, a medal reduction or disqualification.

The monetary value should be kept out of the judges' mind. Rarity is not always equivalent to value. Value is determined by supply and demand. Rarity is determined by how many are known. The U. S. Graf Zeppelin stamps have value but are not rare, or even scarce. There are many available on the market but the demand is high, driving prices up.

Presentation:

Usually the jurors evaluate Presentation before the other criteria.

The whole exhibit and the single sheets should be in balance from an aesthetic point of view. Information must be easy to read, but not overwhelm the philatelic material. There are no rules for the amount of text but it is fair to say that an exhibitor should use only as much text as is absolutely necessary to supplement the philatelic information in telling the story.

When it is necessary to illustrate significant markings on the reverse side of a cover, such markings may be drawn, scanned or illustrated with a reproduction. Modern scanned illustrations generally look best. Color photographs or photocopies must be shot at 75%. If it is not obvious that something is a reproduction, it must be pointed out. Photocopies should be limited in number as they usually detract. Documents must be shown as originals unless there is some compelling reason not to, such as much too large, only known original in a museum, etc.

While Presentation is only worth at most 5 points it can factor into other categories such as Treatment. It is much more important than the point value indicates.