

Exhibition Design — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a real exhibit you can hand to a fabricator or show contractor. You will pick an actual show and booth (or a gallery space), define a single big idea, zone the footprint and design visitor flow, size every panel graphic for its reading distance, test the design with a scale model, and assemble a biddable package of a floor plan, elevations, a graphics schedule, and a materials and fire-safety spec. Work through one section per course module, and keep your plan, graphics schedule, and materials spec reconciled as you go.

Exhibit Foundations and the Brief

Pin down the big idea, the goal, the booth configuration, and every constraint hidden in the show kit before you draw.

Exercise: Write the big idea and the single action

Choose a real exhibitor (your employer, a client, or a brand you know) and a real or plausible show. In plain language, write the one sentence the whole exhibit exists to communicate, then name the single action you want a visitor to take. Pressure-test it: imagine a stranger glancing at your booth from across the aisle for three seconds.

- What is the big idea, in one plain sentence a visitor should remember after walking away?

- What is the single hero message and single hero visual that carry that idea from across the aisle?

- What is the one action you want a visitor to take (scan a badge, book a demo, enter a draw, remember a name)?

- Is the exhibit's primary goal lead generation, a product launch, brand awareness, or deep meetings, and how does that change the layout?

Worksheet: Booth configuration and rules capture

Identify your booth and look up (or reasonably assume) the show's rules. Fill in each field with your value and the source (e.g., the exhibitor manual page). Confirm the configuration first, because it dictates your height and sightline limits.

Show name and venue

Booth size (e.g., 10x20 ft)

Configuration (inline / corner / peninsula / island)

Maximum back-wall height allowed

Aisle-line rule (max height within ~5 ft of the aisle)

Hanging sign allowed? (Y/N) and max height to top of sign

What the booth package already includes (pipe-and-drape, ID sign, carpet, raw floor)

Checklist: Show-kit constraint audit

- I have downloaded and read the exhibitor services manual (show kit)
- I recorded the move-in and move-out windows and any union-labour requirement for setup
- I noted the material and fire-safety requirements (flame ratings, certificates)
- I checked the drayage basis (billed by weight) and flagged it as a reason to design light
- I listed the electrical, lighting, rigging, internet, and lead-scanning order forms and their deadlines
- I confirmed the shipping address and advance-warehouse vs direct-to-show option
- I captured the budget, the reuse expectation (one-off vs many shows), and the fabrication timeline

Spatial Layout and Visitor Flow

Zone the footprint, choreograph flow and sightlines toward the key message, and keep circulation open and accessible.

Exercise: Zone and flow walkthrough

Sketch your booth footprint to scale on grid paper or in software. Mark the attract, engage, and convert zones plus storage and lead-capture. Then trace, with an arrow, the path you want a visitor to take from the aisle to the demo to a staff conversation, and a separate arrow for fast aisle traffic that should not jam your entrance.

- Where is the attract element (overhead sign, hero graphic, motion) that earns the slow-down from the aisle?

- What is the dwell anchor (live demo, interactive, short film, hands-on product) that makes people stay, not just pass?

- Is roughly a third to a half of your open frontage kept clear as an inviting entry, with tall elements pushed to the back and corners?

- Where could a crowd at the demo spill into the aisle and block the entrance, and how will you separate fast traffic from dwell zones?

Worksheet: Zone and furniture plan

List each zone and the furniture or structure it contains. For each, record the intended visitor behaviour and the surface height. Use the height guides from the course (demo ~36-42 in, seated meeting ~29-30 in, bar/counter ~40-42 in).

Zone (attract / engage / convert / support)

Furniture or structure in this zone

Intended visitor behaviour (stop / watch / sit / talk / browse)

Surface height (in)

Approx footprint (W x D, ft)

Open or solid edge to the aisle? (note)

Power / data / lighting needed here? (Y/N)

Checklist: Flow and accessibility check

- There is a clear, inviting entry threshold rather than a counter walling off the open side
- The hero message and demo are visible on a clean sightline from the aisle
- Primary circulation paths are at least roughly 36 inches wide and free of trailing cables
- At least one interactive or service surface is at an accessible height (around 28 to 34 inches)
- Any raised flooring edge is ramped and clearly marked; no single-step trip hazards
- There is a clear turning space inside so a wheelchair or stroller can reverse without backing into the aisle
- Storage, lead-capture, and a tidy spot for staff belongings all have a planned home

Panel and Display Graphics

Size type for each reading distance, compose panels with hierarchy and contrast at eye level, and prep files for large-format print.

Exercise: Reading-distance sizing for your graphics

For each key graphic (overhead identifier, back-wall headline, aisle-edge headline, arm's-length body copy), estimate the longest distance it must be read from, then size it. Use the headline rule of about 1 inch of cap height per 10 feet, and the stricter ~1 inch per 25-30 feet for comfortable reading of important copy. Record results in the reading-distance calculator template.

- What is the viewing distance for your overhead or back-wall identifier, and what minimum cap height does the headline rule give?

- What cap height will your aisle-edge headline use, read from roughly 8 to 15 feet?

- Does the main message survive the squint test from the real distance (blur your eyes or step back)?

- Where have you cut words so the headline can be larger, moving detail to body copy only engaged visitors read?

Worksheet: Panel layout and hierarchy plan

For one key panel, lock in the layout decisions. Fill every field with your decision and a one-line reason. Confirm the most important readable content lands in the eye-level band (roughly 48 to 67 inches, centred near 57 to 60 inches).

Panel name and location

Headline cap height (in)

Subhead cap height (in)

Body copy size (point)

Headline-to-body size ratio

Foreground/background contrast (light-on-dark or dark-on-light)

Vertical placement of key message (top of eye-level band, in above floor)

Typeface (clean open sans-serif name)

Checklist: Large-format production readiness

- Each graphic's resolution is set to its viewing distance (e.g., ~100 dpi at final size for close panels, lower for far back walls)
- I confirmed whether files are supplied at full size or a stated scale, and the dpi expected at that scale
- Bleed is added past every trim/wrap edge, and critical text/logos sit inside a safe zone away from edges, seams, and frame channels
- Seams and panel breaks are planned so no seam slices through a face or a word
- The design was converted to greyscale and the message still reads; no meaning rests on colour alone
- A matte or low-glare finish is specified for anything carrying text
- Critical text over busy photos has a solid panel, scrim, or overlay so it stays readable

Mockups, Materials, and the Build Package

Test the design at scale, choose fire-rated reusable materials and a build method, and assemble a contractor-ready package.

Exercise: Build and walk a scale model

Build a scale model of your booth at a standard scale (1:25 or 1:20 metric, or 1/2 inch to 1 foot imperial), physical or as a navigable 3D model. Include a scale human figure. Walk a sight figure along the aisle and through the booth to test the design before fabrication.

- From the aisle, can you see the identifier, the headline, and the demo with the scale figure standing in the booth?

- Does circulation stay roughly 3 feet wide everywhere, with an inviting entry and no pinch points?

- Do the key messages land in the eye-level band, unobscured by furniture, when viewed at model scale?

- On an island, does every side read as a front, or is there an accidental ugly back to fix?

Worksheet: Materials, fire-rating, and build-method spec

For each major element, choose a material and build method and record its fire compliance. Fill every field, because anything blank is something the contractor will guess. Note weight implications, since drayage is billed by weight.

Element (wall / counter / graphic / flooring / hanging sign)

Material (e.g., aluminium extrusion, tension fabric, Sintra, plywood, Dibond, acrylic)

Build method (modular system name / custom / hybrid / rental)

Fire rating required (e.g., Class A ASTM E84 for surfaces, NFPA 701 for fabric)

Flame certificate on file? (Y/N)

Finish (matte / satin)

Relative weight (light / medium / heavy)

Checklist: Exhibit package readiness

- [] A scaled, dimensioned floor plan shows the booth outline, zones, furniture, structure, and circulation
- [] Elevations show every wall and structure with heights, graphic placement, and the eye-level band
- [] 3D views or a navigable model convey the look and experience in the round
- [] The graphics schedule lists every panel with size, artwork file, substrate, finish, and exact placement
- [] The materials and finishes spec gives substrates, frame system, exact colour references (Pantone/paint), and required fire ratings
- [] Logistics notes include a crate plan with weights, the move-in/move-out schedule, and labour, rigging, electrical, and lighting needs
- [] Print-ready artwork or a clear art-supply note is provided, and a proof of the hero graphic is requested before full production
- [] Shop-drawing/proof sign-off, a pre-show full build (for large custom), and a punch-list walkthrough are built into the schedule

Your Action Plan

1. Choose a real exhibitor and show, write the one-sentence big idea, and name the single visitor action the exhibit drives toward.
2. Identify the booth configuration and extract every height, sightline, fire, labour, and logistics constraint from the exhibitor services manual.
3. Sketch the footprint to scale and zone it into attract, engage, and convert areas with storage and lead-capture.
4. Choreograph visitor flow and protect a clean sightline from the aisle to the hero message and a dwell anchor (demo or interactive).
5. Keep the entry open and circulation at least 36 inches wide, with an accessible-height surface and any raised edge ramped.
6. Size the overhead identifier, headlines, and body copy for their real reading distances using the inch-per-10-feet headline rule and the squint test.
7. Compose panels with clear hierarchy and strong contrast, placing the key readable message in the eye-level band, and verify in greyscale.
8. Prepare large-format files at distance-appropriate resolution with bleed, safe zones, and planned seams, on a matte low-glare finish.
9. Build a scale model with a human figure (and a full-size mockup of any high-risk piece) to test sightlines, flow, and reach before fabrication.
10. Choose fire-rated, reusable materials and a modular, custom, or hybrid build method, then assemble the floor plan, elevations, graphics schedule, materials spec, and logistics notes into one reconciled package for an accurate bid.

