

## Using Questions as Titles on Museum Exhibit Labels to Direct Visitor Attention and Increase Learning

Dissertation Abstract  
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This dissertation applied concepts from cognitive psychology to the design of museum exhibit labels in an effort to direct visitor attention and increase learning in museum settings. A series of three studies focused on factors affecting whether or not using a question (instead of a word or statement) as a title on a museum exhibit label would increase the visitor's memory of the information presented in the label text. In all three experiments, the labels accompanying the bird dioramas at the Bell Museum of Natural History at the University of Minnesota were rewritten. Subjects (college students) visited the museum at their leisure. At the end of their visit they were surprised with a multiple choice test on the content of the experimental labels.

Study One compared the teaching effectiveness of three different types of questions as titles on exhibit labels: textually explicit, textually implicit, and scriptally implicit questions.

All three types of questions led to better memory of the label text than did traditional, statement titles, but there was no difference in the effectiveness of the three types of questions. A follow-up quiz administered three weeks later showed the same results.

In Study Two subjects were exposed to a gallery in which half of the labels began with questions and half began with traditional, statement titles. Subjects were tested on both the factual content of the labels and the visual content of the displays. In this study some subjects were told they would be tested (cued) and others were not (uncued). Subjects remembered more from labels that had questions in place of regular titles, but remembered more about the visual displays that had labels with regular titles. There were no differences in the scores of the cued and uncued subjects.

In Study Three subjects were exposed to a gallery that contained either long labels (100 words) or short labels (50 words). For each length condition, half of the labels had questions in place of titles and half had traditional, statement titles. Subjects remembered more from labels that had question titles regardless of the length of the label.

Copies of the dissertation are available from the author for \$15 plus postage and handling (\$3 USA, \$4 Canada/Mexico, \$5 Over Seas). Send a check payable to Jane Marie Litwak to 37 Sidney Place, Minneapolis, MN 55414. The 200 page document contains an extensive literature review, complete descriptions of the three studies, and copies of all data forms and label text used.

### *VISITOR BEHAVIOR*

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