



**SOUTHEAST  
FEDERATION  
OF  
MINERALOGICAL SOCIETIES, INC.**



**DISPLAY  
SHOWMANSHIP  
FOR  
PRIZE  
WINNING  
EXHIBITS**

by

**Jessie Chittenden**

# DISPLAY SHOWMANSHIP

Jessie Chittenden

Showmanship is one of the most important parts of display, but the least understood. This article is going to try to bring a little light on the problem.

To bring showmanship closer to what everyone sees every day let's consider art and especially commercial art as seen in advertising and store window displays. True, in these cases they are trying to sell something, but aren't we trying to show off our work to the best advantage so others can enjoy it?

Consider an expensive store with three fur coats in the window. One will probably be on a pedestal to give it height and the other two grouped together. The figures will be turned partially toward each other to hold the interest within the display and there will probably be smaller accessories such as a scarf, gloves, purse, hat, or related articles grouped so as to tie the whole window together. Or take a poster or magazine ad. There will be some word, line, or picture to get your attention and then the message flows easily from one thing to the next. In both of the above cases there are plenty of open spaces and margins to give your eyes a rest but holds your attention within the display instead of wandering to something else. Now I will try to bring these principles down to our immediate need for mineral and gem display.

## IN GENERAL

The first thing you have to know is what you are going to display. This will start pinning down important factors such as color, texture, light, etc.

Second, if you are going into competition, read all, and I mean ALL, of the rules pertaining to your display. This means general rules as well as specific ones.

Third, work toward a definite idea of movement to carry the eye through your display. Lines should show a smooth flowing rhythm moving from one portion of the case to another. Conflicting lines and angles only lead to spottiness and confusion. A good rule is to work in groups of odd numbers (3, 5, 7) but tie them together with color, the placement of the material or the structural lines of the risers and furniture. These should repeat or flow from the lines of the case.

Fourth, be alert at all times to new materials, new possibilities, but keep in mind at all times that SHOWMANSHIP is showing your material to the best advantage.

## THE CASE

The type of case used has a lot to do with showmanship. At the shows you see them all the way from flat cases with no lights up to large upright cases with lights on the outside showing through frosted glass or plastic that diffuses the light. The low slant front cases that so many of the societies use are easy to carry but have poor lighting. One way to beat this is to add a light box on the outside. (Fig. 1)

So often the Juniors have a flat box with no lights, so in an emergency a gooseneck lamp can be used, but some light is always needed.

One of the best cases is an upright with the lights on the outside to keep the heat out and a slant front to keep down reflections. The lights should be hidden by the sides of the case and heat resistant glass between them and the display. All cases should have ventilation, but cover the openings with screen to keep out the insects. The floor of the cases should be at least six inches above the table level which is usually thirty inches. If it is an upright case you should be able to look at it without bending over. Of course you consider the display for the average person of 5' 5" to 6' 2". (Fig. 2)

In some localities it is possible to rent display cases and have them delivered to the show room and picked up after the show. At Anaheim this proved cheaper for some societies than using their own case. Most displays call for twelve square feet of table space. How you use it is up to you.

## THE LIGHTS

The type of light you use is very important and differs with what you are displaying. Faceted material needs spots of light, transparencies need back lighting, and the majority of displays need good overall lighting to cut down on shadows. Above all use a white light to get true color. The long case lights and ordinarily all incandescent bulbs give a yellow light. Recently I saw a case of faceted stones lit with many of the small clear flame shaped bulbs in the top of the case. It really gave lots of sparkle to the facets. The Los Angeles County museum, on their mineral cases, uses three long fluorescent bulbs, two white and one pink, to give a more natural color. Watch your wattage and the heat or many minerals and especially opal can be ruined.

Be sure you have more light inside the case than outside or people will be looking at their own reflections and that isn't what they came to see.

## THE CASE LINING

If you use your own case or use a society case where you have measurements the best bet is to cut liner forms of 1/8 inch plywood or cardboard and cover them. Pegboard is handy when hanging things on the back or sides because

you can fill the needed holes with balsa wood and have something good to hold the pins, but you have to use plastic or muslin under your cloth to hide the holes. Fir-tex is easy to pin into but makes a thick liner. You can get finished veneer panels at the building supply stores which is beautiful but is not of fine enough texture to be suitable for most of our minerals and gems. Corrugated cardboard that you pick up as boxes back of home appliance stores seems to be very good if you get a good smooth piece. At the lumber yards you can also get sheets of a heavy cardboard under various trade names that is good. A new material, Foam Core, is good. It is a styrofoam type of material that is light but covered with a cardboard that prevents denting. It can be bought at display companies.

In covering your liners never use glue on the front surface of your liner, because the heat of the lights will be apt to wrinkle the material. Just the heat in a camper going to San Diego ruined one liner. Another thing to remember is that excessive heat will expand styrofoam if it is used for risers, so just try to "keep your cool," and avoid things affected by heat or go prepared.

The best way to hold the cloth on the liner form is by sewing. (Fig. 3) Masking tape to hold it in place works fairly well but many tapes come loose in the heat of the case. White glue can be used on the back with pins to hold it in place until the glue dries. (Fig. 4)

Plan your liners so as little space shows in the crack as possible. If you look into the crack it is much more prominent so put the back in first, then the bottom and then the sides. (Fig. 5)

The material to cover the boards with varies greatly due to the specimens to be shown which varies from faceted stones to petrified wood and from howlite to sphalerite or other dark materials. Since you want to show your material to the best advantage you must study what you have and then go shopping.

If you are using a borrowed case and know the size, take a piece of material the length of the case plus twice the height and wide enough for the width and height. Two yards of at least thirty inch material is usually enough. Find the middle of the material lengthwise and thumbtack to the top of the back. Use thumbtacks that match the material. Then thumbtack the rest of the top back. Bring it down smooth and put tacks at the two lower corners. (Remove them later.) Smooth out the bottom and tack the front corners. Fold the ends back on the bottom (Fig. 6a), take hold of points A and B and bring up on the end (Fig. 6b). Tack back corner and cut off or fold under the excess material, and finish tacking the top edge. This will make a good smooth end with no slant lines to detract.

There are basic rules to follow in choosing your materials.

1. Never let the texture of the material overpower your specimens. For jewelry, faceted stones, and miniatures a fine texture is best.

2. Shiny materials pick up too many highlights and detract. For this reason the old technique of folding or bunching satin or velvet is very poor for showmanship.
3. Light colors reflect light and give better vision in the case. Dark colors absorb light and are usually not good except in some cases like howlite which doesn't show up to advantage on white. But avoid strong contrasts of black and white because it takes interest away from your specimens.
4. The color is important. For best results in most cases an off-white is best, such as cream, peach, eggshell, green, blue, or gray. White can be used but is better with a slight texture to cut down on glare. By texture we refer to the surface finish such as double knits, basket weave, linen, nubby, terrycloth, burlap, carpeting, and even roofing paper which was well used in a case of large sculpture. The coarse texture should be avoided except in very special cases. Straw cloth is quite generally used but in cases of jewelry, faceted stones, and some crystals the highlights do reflect in the display and look like flaws.

One of the most satisfactory colors is a very light soft pink. It goes with practically everything. Strong colors attract too much attention to themselves. Bright red does nothing for a display, although if you must have a red background for a certain display such as heavy Indian jewelry, try a very dull rusty red or a deep wine red.

Remember that your judges are human, and believe it or not, or whether they know it or not, colors do affect people looking at your case. Your warm (reds and yellows) soft colors are more pleasing and the cool colors (blues and greens) while restful, do not give as good a background. Although I have seen some exhibit halls where a little coolness would have been welcome. Your accents of the dark cool colors of your minerals are more attractive against the warmer background.

5. Keep your liner neutral so it stays in the background and enhances your displayed material.
6. The type of material varies and actual names do not mean much as they change from one year to the next. If you are going to be using irregular shapes in risers and other furniture, the two way stretch material is great, but expensive. Even two way stretch girdle material in a plain pattern has a good texture. Shop the department store yardage departments, special yardage stores, and drapery stores for the desired texture, color, and weight of material for your case.

## FURNITURE

This covers all the things that hold your display in place. Here again they are merely devices to show your material to the best advantage and should not distract. Some cases become so complicated and tricky they overpower the display.

1. Risers can be made of styrofoam, wood, cardboard, boxes, etc. Styrofoam is the easiest to work with but you can run into problems in transportation unless they are protected from accidental dents. If possible cut it on a band saw so you have good square corners and edges. Polyurethane, a very fine textured styrofoam put out by Dow Chemicals, can be shaped by sawing and filing to give rounded edges and interesting curves.

For just straight risers the edges should be straight and the corners at right angles to the bottom. When covering them be sure to keep the material so it gives straight lines at the corners and no diagonal lines showing. Where you have a diagonal fold, the best thing to do is cut a piece of tagboard or index card the size of the side being covered and slip under the cloth and fold the diagonals underneath. This avoids having the folds showing through. A blind stitch at the corners makes the cracks less noticeable. Here again make all folds so you don't look into them from the front of the case. Use pins to hold the material on the bottom. (Fig. 7)

A good simple holder for slabs and other specimen is made from coat-hangers or finer wire for smaller items. (Fig. 8a) In cases of transparencies style 8b is better because the wires won't show through so much. When these are painted to match the lining material they are very inconspicuous. For opaque cabs or small pieces, a suitable length can be cut from a balsa dowel and glued to the back, or fasten it with one of the new floral clays. Plastecine is too oily. The one I use is Golden Gate All Purpose Tape Adhesive. It comes in white or green on a roll and seems to have no oil. There are other similar ones on the market.

Pins are helpful in propping and holding things in place, especially the "T" pins used by macrame workers. They also come in a smaller size. Get a supply of pins from the notion counter at your nearest variety store, from 3/8" to the 2" variety. They all have uses in display. One society even gold plated the pins used in holding the gold jewelry. The silk pins are very thin and best for this. The pins should never be very evident where used. At Anaheim one displayer used pins to hold the material on the back of a rounded form. It was neat and couldn't be seen from the front without practically standing on your head, but points were taken off because the pins could be seen from the cross aisle next to his case. So be sure everything is neat and no pins, tape, thumbtacks, etc. showing from any angle.

For necklaces, pins, rings, etc. be sure they are wearable with chains, pins, and bolo cord as needed. Buckles do not need belts. The stands to hold these should be as inconspicuous as possible. If rings are to be displayed on a styrofoam riser you can cut off half of the top of a "T" pin and use it to anchor the ring at the bottom. Or if the mounting is open behind the stone a pin can be used to prop up the ring. The pins should be colored to match the background or silver or gold color to match the jewelry, whatever shows up the least. It is a question whether one pin or wire used as a prop should be discounted on showmanship if it is inconspicuous. It is much better than some of the more expensive holders.

For pedestals or stands there are a wide variety of things used but styrofoam is probably the most common, but like many things that are "old hat" they are frowned upon. They are still one of the best if clean, neat, and the proper size for what is displayed. The thing being displayed should not hang over the edge of the stand nor be dwarfed by the size of the stand. Shiny material like glass, plastic, and lacquered woods give off too many reflections. A fine garnet paper will sand plastic to a good surface. One display used frosted window glass which was very good. Styrofoam is very good when sprayed with a paint to blend in with the background color. These plastic colors are dull and will not dissolve the styrofoam.

## ARRANGEMENT

Now we are down to the actual placing of the materials in your case. Since cases vary greatly we will work from floor and elevation plans. Figure 9 gives you some layouts. These layouts are general and may not fit your display at all but will point up some major factors.

1. Don't overcrowd your display or it will look like a junk shop window instead of showing off your beautiful material. If a stone or mineral has a blemish it is better to leave it out of the case than taking a chance on losing points. Organize your case so your eye moves easily from one part to the next of your own case and not on to your neighbors. Open space helps you stay in your own case. A center of interest and the movement of the eye can be obtained by color, size of material, or some unusual item. The most eye catching piece should be your center of interest. Color should be scattered through the case but the most colorful pieces closer to the center of interest. Movement can also be carried through the case by the placing of a crystal so the slant or point carries you back to the main interest. The chain of a necklace or slant of a pin will also keep your eye moving from one area to another. In placing a specimen be sure to arrange it to catch the best light and show to the best advantage.

2. Balance your case. Remember the old teeter-totter? Skinny sat way out at the end of the plank, but the fatter you were the closer you sat to the middle. This holds true in display. Not that you can't use some smaller pieces closer to the center and larger pieces further out, but never pushed into corners. This pulls the eye to the next case and makes your case look crowded.
3. Actual arrangements are shown in Figure 9. The first six are planned for flat or slant front cases which you usually get when using a borrowed case, and you are unable to have risers to fit. Case A is pushed clear into the corners and no imagination is used in the arrangement. D has used the same material but grouped them and left some open spaces, so that all holds together and is not spotty. G has used risers and let the edge of the riser tie things together in a symmetrical arrangement. Now to B which is pulled into the center of the case and wastes a lot of good space. E has used grouping of the material and opened it up more, while H has used risers to give height and a line to tie things together. Case C is crowded and cluttered because there is no pattern, no open space, and too much in the case. F uses a curved line in the placing of the specimens and a few placed parallel to the front of the case to keep your eyes from swinging on to the next case. Case I goes back to a symmetrical arrangement of risers in curved tiers and is probably the best where you have to have 30 to 50 specimens of about the same size.
4. Your whole case should be a harmonious picture that stresses the material you are showing. The use of unrelated materials such as plastic flowers, driftwood, sand, figurines, etc. merely detract and clutter up the case. They may be interesting but not for a mineral, fossil, jewelry, or gem display.

### LABELS

Your labels are judged twice. The first time for nomenclature and information. With care in spelling and knowledge of your material you should get full points on this. The second is showmanship. Do they improve instead of detract from the case?

The lettering should be simple and easy to read. Old English or other fancy letters have no place on a label that is for information only. Architectural lettering is good and clear but most people do not have the practice to do it well. A typewriter can be used but be sure your type is clean and you have a good ribbon and use even pressure on your keys. If you can get someone to do your labels on an electric IBM Executive machine with Gothic type, it is great. But we don't all have access to this type of equipment. Even manual typewriters with Gothic type are hard to find but a good pica type is very readable. The elite type is a little small. Where small lettering is necessary as in micromounts you can type up your labels and have them reduced in size by a photopress. But don't reduce to where they are hard to read or it is poor

showmanship, as they don't fulfill their purpose.

Labels that are too big clutter up the case. Labels should be clean rectangular shapes with neat lettering and of a material heavy enough to stay where placed. There are several different types of press on letters out now used by architects and commercial artists that are easy to use. You can get them at Art stores and most college book stores. The three known to me are Prestype, Latraset, and Instantype but there are probably more. They come in many sizes and faces.

The machines like dynatype give a plastic label which curls in the heat of the case and usually has a dark background which stands out as spots throughout your case. The label color should blend with your case material. The engraved plastic labels are good if the color harmonizes, but so often the background is black or dark wood grain with white letters and in looking at the case you are very conscious of spots before your eyes.

All capitals are usually easier to read than upper and lower case letters, but in mineral displays where they call for capitalization of the most important mineral you have a problem. One solution is to use two sizes of capital letters.

Never lean a label against a specimen. Flat on the bottom makes them less conspicuous. Arrange them (Fig. 10) so they are parallel to the front of the case or follow the edge of the riser. Be consistent in your label as to size, lettering, and placing. No one should have to twist their head to read a label.

Figure 11 shows a good simple line alphabet as a guide for making labels. Also an example of poor letters for labels.

### FINAL CHECK

After your case is set up, stand back and check.

1. Is the case well lighted?
2. Is the case arrangement simple, well organized, with no over crowding or cluttering?
3. Do the lining, labels, and furniture remain inconspicuous?
4. Is the case and display clean with no fingerprints, lint, or other foreign objects such as keys, thumbtacks, etc. showing? Is the lining pressed?
5. Have you planned where you will put your name plate and ribbon after the judging so you won't have to put it on top of the display? People still want to see what you won on.
6. Does anything cast shadows or hide anything? Glass shelves are particularly bad for this reason.
7. Be sure to take along a box of necessities when you go to put in a case, such as window cleaner, paper towels, small brush to brush out lint, masking tape, double faced scotch tape to make something stay where you put it, pins, material to make a new label if needed, etc. A good

rule is to drop things you use in making up a case into a box and take it with you. Accidents do happen in transit and a tube of 5 minute epoxy has covered many a tragedy.

### MY LAST WORD

If you don't believe these principles are basic, the next time you go to a show, stand back and see which cases are most attractive and enjoyed the most. Do people say: "Look at that case!", "What a mess!", "How cute!" or do they stand and absorb the contents, or pass it by? What do you want in a mineral or gem display?

For further reading on the subject see:

Display Techniques by J. Chittenden, Lapidary Journal, March 1971

Showmanship by Paul F. Patchick, Rock and Gem, October 1972

He also gives a good bibliography.

C.F.M.S. Exhibitors Manual, revised edition 1969.

### WHERE TO FIND IT

Since CFMS covers such a wide area it is hard to give names of stores in telling where to find supplies, but here are some of the types of stores. Where store names are used they are in the Los Angeles area and may be in other larger cities. Check your telephone yellow pages.

House of Fabrics, known to be in the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas.  
Carries straw cloth under the name of Loop Knit Cloth.

#### Cloth Liners

Department Store yardage and drapery departments  
Yardage Stores, and many novelty stores

#### Polyurethane

Call your closest Dow Chemical office to see where you can buy it in sheets, which vary in thickness.

#### Styrofoam

Hobby Shops  
Flower Arrangement Supply Stores  
Standard Brands  
Building Supply Centers

#### Pressed Cardboard sheets, Firtex, etc.

Lumber yards  
Building Supply Stores

Corrugated Cardboard in large sheets.

Back of stores that sell large household appliances

Floral Clay and Plastic Spray

Flower Arrangement Supply Stores like Stats and Mosketels

Balsa Wood Dowel

Hobby Stores

Pins, Thumbtacks, etc.

Novelty Stores

Super Markets

Sewing Centers

Press on Letters

Artist Supply Stores

Any college book store where they have classes in art and architecture.

Foam Core

Check Display Companies in your area. In Los Angeles the Centruy Display Co., 1200 South Figueroa carries it. Display companies are also a good supply source for letters, papers, cardboard, corrugated paper, etc.

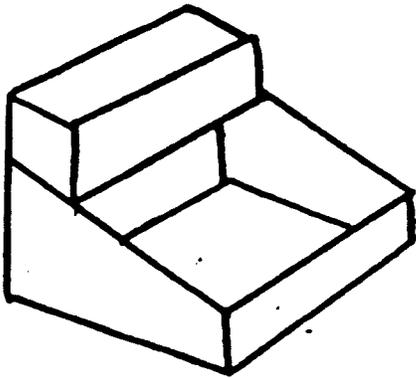


Figure 1  
Light box on outside of case

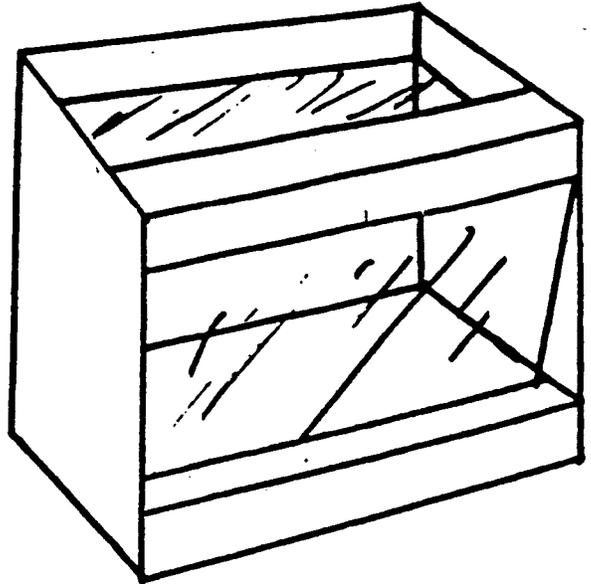


Figure 2  
Lights on outside  
Glass in slant front and top

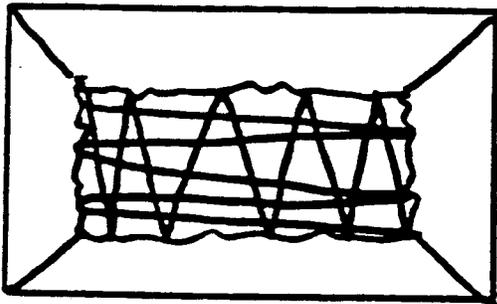


Figure 3  
Cloth sewn on

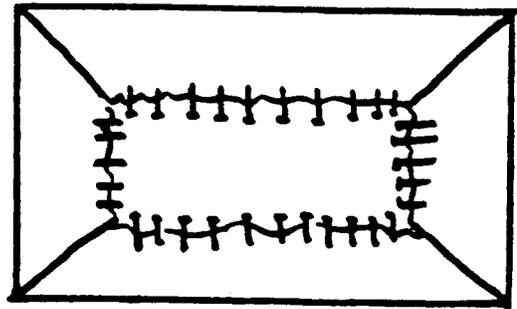


Figure 4  
Temporary pins to hold cloth  
while glue dries.

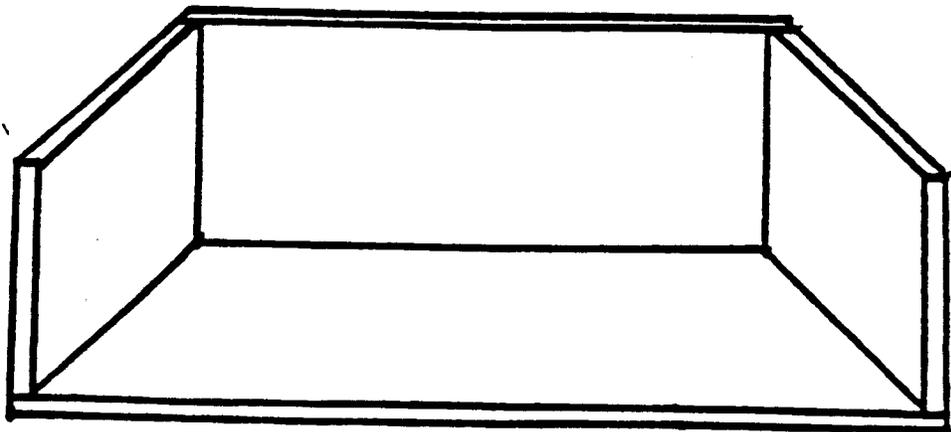


Figure 5  
Put in the back, bottom and then sides.

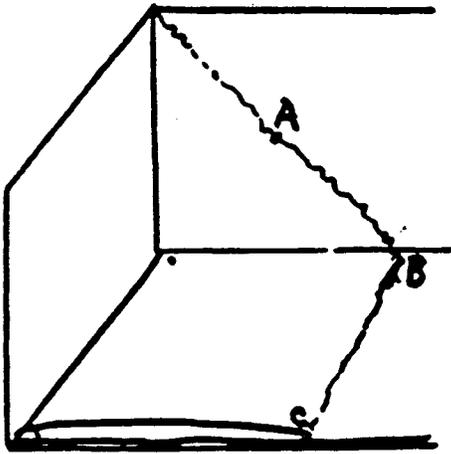


Figure 6a  
Covering a case with one piece of cloth

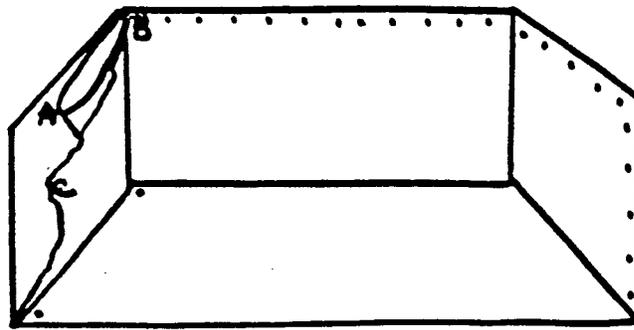
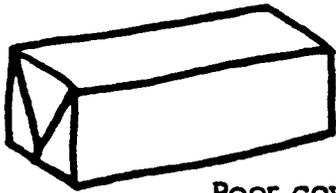
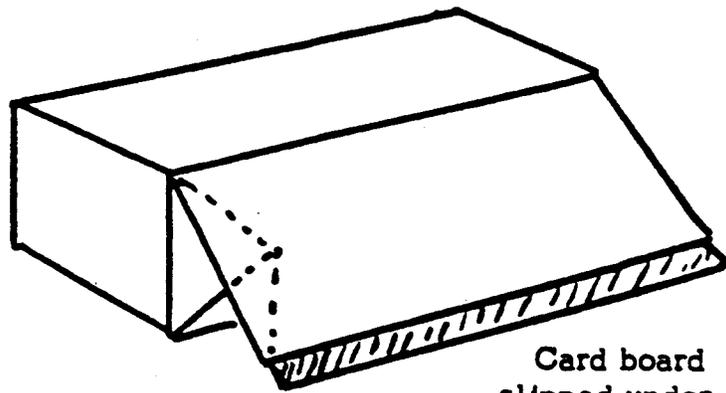


Figure 6b



Poor cover

Figure 7  
All corners straight, no slants.



Card board  
slipped under  
top layer of cloth

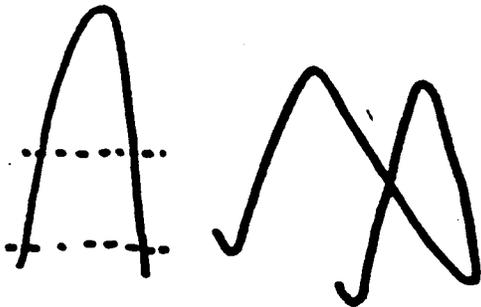


Figure 8a  
Easles made of coat hangers

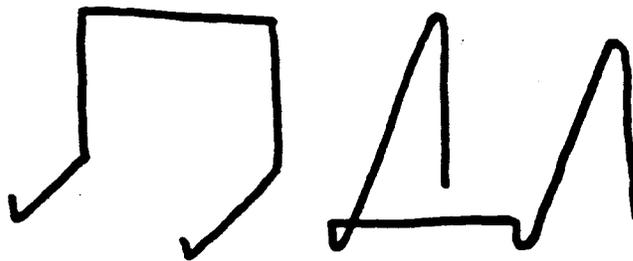
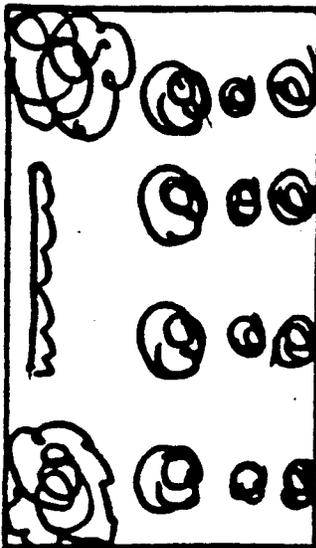
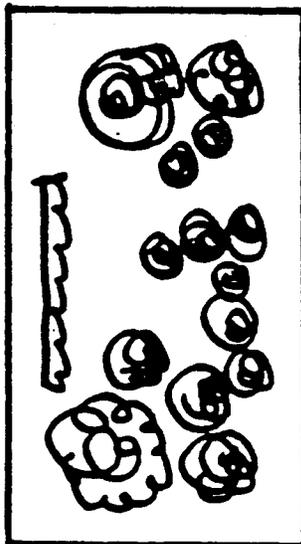


Figure 8b

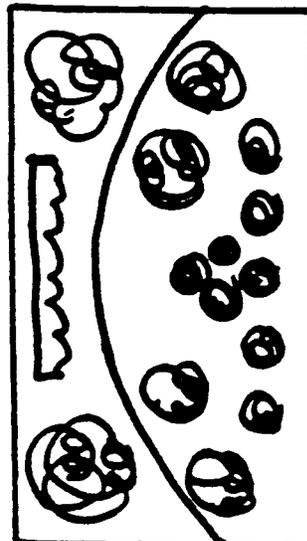
Figure 9



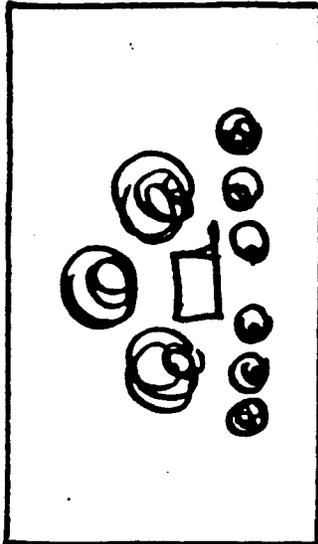
A Pushed in corners  
Too close to front



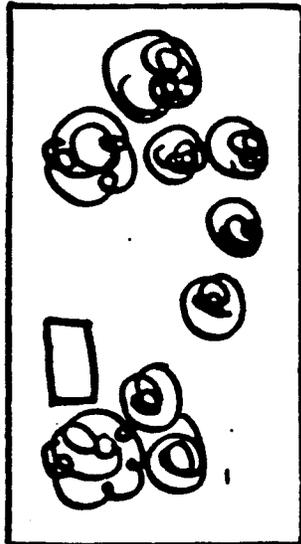
D Opened up by grouping  
Better spacing



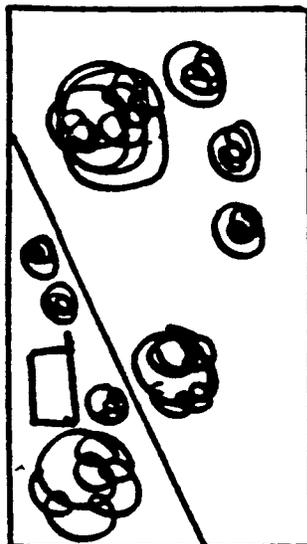
G Riser used to  
give height  
Symmetrical arrange-  
ment.



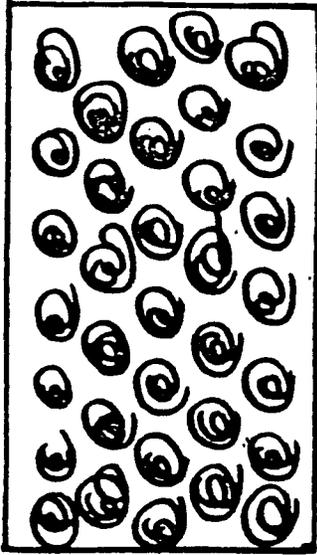
B Too crowded in center



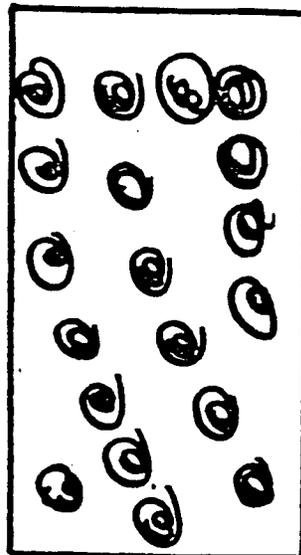
E Better grouping



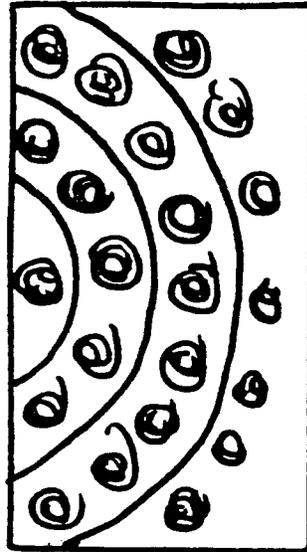
H Riser and  
better grouping



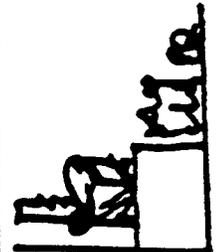
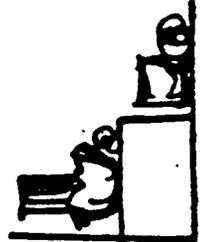
C Too many pieces  
Too crowded



F Fewer pieces and a  
rhythm of line



I Tiers where  
many pieces the  
same size are  
shown



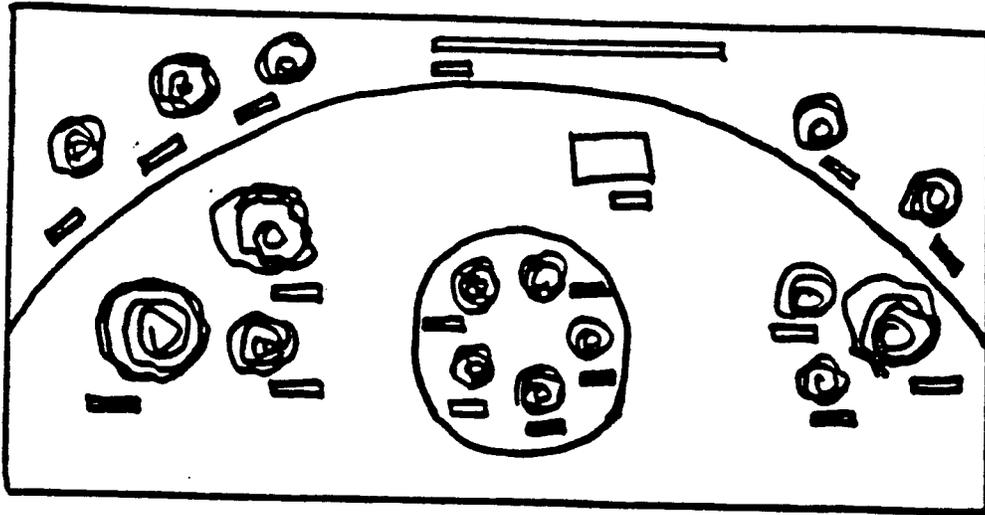


Figure 10  
Placing of labels

Figure 11 Lettering for labels

ABCDEFGHIJKLMN  
 OPQRSTUVWXYZ  
 abcdefghijklmn  
 opqrstuvwxyz  
 1234567890

Poor letters for labels.

EMPLOY. *E.M.P.L*  
 18 employe *24 employment*