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Museum Exhibits

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### Turning Point Exhibit Review

The Turning Point exhibit is located at the Atlanta History Center in Atlanta, Georgia. The exhibit first opened in 1996 and has been a permanent exhibit since. The exhibit focuses on Civil War history and telling the overarching story of what the war was like. The exhibit has very few things that it does strongly and has many weaknesses. Some of which include the artifacts, the exhibit labels, and the overall layout.

The first of many weaknesses that the exhibit has are the artifacts that were chosen to go on display. The artifacts that have been chosen lack the ability to cohesively tell one given story. This paired with the sheer amount of them can be overwhelming to guests. As you enter the exhibit the first impressions that a visitor has is that of an overwhelming sense of confusion. The artifacts that are on display in this first room do nothing to add to the story being told on the paneling. This can be seen as you walk throughout the exhibit. The disconnect between the objects and their text creates a dissonance that can be felt throughout the exhibit. Another weakness of the artifacts is that of the sheer amount of



Figure 1 Turning point case. Photo Credit Camille Cole

them. Instead of having a few key artifacts on display to aid in the telling of the story. They exhibit overwhelms it guess with crowded cases. By doing this the story that the exhibit is trying to tell is drown out by the voices of the objects. Walking into this exhibit is like walking into a noisy crowded room and trying to listen to only one conversation. An example of this from the exhibit can be seen in the ammunition room. This room contains and an entire wall full of different munitions. The number of artifacts here is overwhelming it feels as though they wanted to put an entire type collection on display in one case. This covers up the possible stories that could be told such as how these munitions were made or who was making them and what their lives were like. These would have been better stories to have told then the unknown one of this display. The third weakness of the artifact was their placement in the exhibit. The placement of artifacts in the exhibit felt sporadic and did not aid in the overall story. As you walk throughout the exhibit you see objects of the same type that could have been placed together or removed entirely scattered throughout the exhibit. This can be seen especially with the guns that are on display. As you walk through you feel as if each case has at least one in it. By having them scattered throughout the exhibit helps further the dissonance created by the paneling and the artifacts. Within the cases themselves, the placement of artifacts makes the various cases look busy and over crowded. Some cases have artifacts that are on the sidewalls of the case making it to where visitors might miss the object entirely if they are not standing at a certain angle. This placement of the artifacts makes the exhibit feel more like an eye-spy game than a learning environment. Overall, there is a lot of changes that need to be made to the Turning Point exhibit regarding artifacts.

The second major set of weakness the exhibit has are the exhibit text placed throughout the exhibit. The first weakness of the exhibit paneling is the length of the text. The text length

in the exhibit is several paragraphs long and is a wall of solid text. This makes it hard for guests that do not like to read the paneling to get the overall message of the panel quickly before they lose interest and move on to the next object that catches their attention. The length of the text is influenced by how much detail the panels go into. Instead of starting broad and letting the visitor get the main idea of the panel to start with the panel makes the reader search the text to find what the main overall point of the panel is. By having visitors read the whole panel they begin to lose interest in reading the rest of the exhibit paneling and start to wander around the exhibit just looking at the artifacts and not understanding the whole story. This defeats the point of the exhibit.

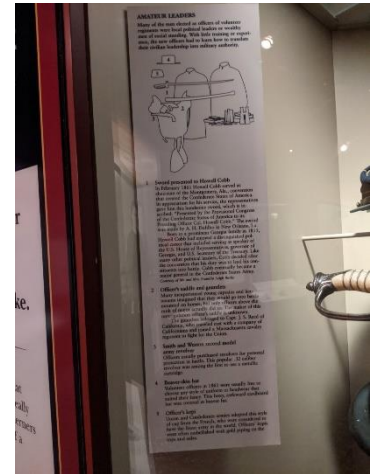


Figure 2 Example of label copy.  
Photo Credit Camille Cole

Exhibits are supposed to teach their visitors about topics that they would not normally get to learn about in a traditional academic setting. By having visitors lose interest they are not learning and comprehending the overall message of the exhibit. Another problem with the exhibit labels is the size of the font on the labels. On some of the labels, the font is so small that it is unreadable unless the visitor gets close to the label. This makes the exhibit less accessible for those that might not be able to see very well. The last weakness for the exhibit labels would be the placement of the panels. The panel placement in the exhibit was very sporadic. A lot of the labels did not correspond with the object that they were placed near. This hurts the overall cohesiveness of the exhibit. Another weakness with the placement of the exhibit labels is that some of the labels are at ankle level. This makes it harder for the visitor to see the labels and read what they have to say. Overall, there is a lot that needs to be reworked with the labels in this exhibit.

The third weakness with the exhibit is the overall layout of the exhibit. When you first walk into the exhibit you come into a circular room. This room is very confusing because both sides of the circle have text on them, and it is hard to know where to start reading from. As you move from this room to the rest of the exhibit you are conflicted about where to start looking and where the exhibit is supposed to transition to the next topic. The number of objects in the exhibit was detrimental to the overall flow of the exhibit. Instead of having one clear path for visitors to follow an overarching story. They are left to fend for themselves and to make their way through the exhibit. This allows visitors to only see objects that go with their ideals and not see anything that may challenge their ideal set. This is a problem because the overall message that the exhibit is trying to convey is covered up and not heard by the visitor. The layout also has lots of hidden corners with objects in them. This could allow the visitor to miss a key bit of information in the story of the exhibit. The third weakness of the overall layout is the lack of interactive elements in the exhibit. Interactive elements are key to helping visitors retain information. The interactives in the exhibit were outdated and lack a real point. The first interactive you come to in the exhibit is an interactive map that lets you see the various battles that happened. When using this interactive element there was no real instruction on how to use the element and it took a good amount of time to figure out what it was showing you. This can make visitors frustrated and not in a good mindset for learning. Overall, the layout of the exhibit needs to be reworked.

The Turning Point exhibit at the Atlanta History Center. Is an exhibit that has more weaknesses than it does strengths. These weaknesses can be seen in the artifacts that were selected for the exhibit, the exhibit panels that are in the exhibit as well as in the overall layout of the exhibit. There is much to be done to improve the exhibit for future visitors.